Namdhari Guru Ram Singh

National Biography

NAMDHARI GURU RAM SINGH

JOGINDER SINGH

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Preface

Writing the biography of a person implies restating his/her life history. The traditional approach of restating such history requires an objective account of the life for throwing light on those social processes which explore the subjective dimensions of a life on the one hand and trace their historical connections in the contemporary social, political and cultural structures on the other. Moreover, this exercise also involves the interpretation of a variety of antecedents and events related to that person.

This is a challenging task as it requires the analysis of contemporary sources. However, this task becomes easier if sources like autobiography, personal diary and letters of that person are available. The information provided in these sources can be compared and examined with reference to other contemporary sources. In the case of Namdhari Guru Ram Singh, we have both, some personal letters as well as long official reports. However, writing an objective account of the Namdhari Guru is problematic in many ways. The contemporary official records and reports are, no doubt, available in abundance but suffer from the subjectivity of threat-perception. After the annexation of Kingdom of Lahore in 1849, the primary task of the British government was to consolidate their *Raj*. Any individual or sect or community which asserted its autonomy and refused to prove his or her loyalty towards the *Raj*, was perceived as a source of threat and was treated ruthlessly. In the post-

Uprising period of 1857, the British felt danger when any such case was reported to them. In the case of Namdhari Guru, the notion of threat appeared real as he did not pronounce his loyalty to the British Raj and kept his activities secret till some incidents took place in and after 1863. Moreover, adversaries of the Namdhari Guru Ram Singh comprising Sodhis, Bedis and priests (*Mahants* and *Pujaris)* added some more substance to this threat when they spoke unfavourable for his teachings and programme because he did not conform to their beliefs and practices. In fact, they themselves felt a threat from his mission. For drawing favour or pecuniary benefit from the British, they exaggerated the degree of threat or danger involved in the activities of the Namdhari Guru and his followers. Nevertheless, in spite of the subjective element in the official reports or the memoranda submitted by these people, this category of sources remains indispensable because these are the only available sources. The mission of the Namdhari Guru, his strategy and organisation, have been examined on the basis of official records and corroborated with the letters of the Namdhari Guru. But there are some differences in the nature and scope of these sources. The officials were primarily concerned with his political activities whereas the Guru exhorted his followers to meditate in the name of God and strengthen themselves spiritually and physically for meeting the socio-religious and political challenges.

After the rise of Namdhari Guru Ram Singh as the spiritual and temporal leader of the Namdhari community, several hagiographies have been written by his devout followers around the personality of their gurus—reverently called Satgurus. The process of producing hagiographic literature started when the Namdhari writers wrote Sakhis of their gurus and *gathas* of heroic deeds of the Kuka Singhs who laid down their lives during the Kuka movement in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Earliest among these writers were Sant Chanda Singh, Baba Kahla Singh,

Sant Dhian Singh Kadrabadi, Sant Santokh Singh and Sant Nidhan Singh Alam. They had the privilege to serve their Satgurus, Hari Singh and Partap Singh, and stayed at Bhaini Sahib headquarters. They had access to those Kukas who were confidants of Namdhari Guru Ram Singh and recorded oral accounts and incidents in which the Guru and his confidants were involved. In addition to eulogising their Satguru and building up a spiritual hallow around him, these writers spelled out attributes of Namdhari *maryada* and stated social evils, beliefs and practices of holymen and priestly classes, and the challenges posed by these people to the Kuka Singhs. In response to this milieu, some of them wrote *Bara-mahas* and *Satguru Bilas* in the late 19th century and early 20th century.

The first chapter of this book presents an account of the British policies executed for consolidating the British Raj and condition of the Sikhs, especially the Sikh Chiefs (*Sardars* and *Jagirdars*) and the holymen (*Mahants* and *Pujaris, Sants* and *Babas*). The Namdhari Guru, directly or indirectly, interacted with them. The second chapter describes briefly the background of the Namdhari Guru's family, his early life including service in the Khalsa army and interaction with his spiritual mentor—Baba Balak Singh—who propounded the socio-religious attributes of the Namdhari mission. The third chapter analyses various phases of transformation in the Namdhari mission under Namdhari Guru Ram Singh. It also examines his strategy and organisation for mobilising the Sant Khalsa and building a mass movement against the British Raj and its allies. The fourth chapter examines the official assessment of Namdhari Guru's political motives and insurgent activities of his followers. It also describes the ruthless suppression of the Kuka movement by the British. This assessment is primarily based upon the published archival records. The fifth chapter analyses Namdhari Guru's deportation to Rangoon, arrangements for his stay there and the controversy over his death. It also describes

the primary concerns of the Namdhari Guru which he himself unfolded in his letters popularly called *hukamnamas*.

The last chapter is about those attributes of Namdhari Guru Ram Singh's personality which were constructed by the Namdhari writers subsequently. These writers also focused on the political overtones of the teachings of their spiritual master Satguru Ram Singh. Important among these writers were Inder Singh Chakarvarti and Nidhan Singh Alam. Besides, we have several articles and books which were written by non-Namdhari writers and historians like Dr Ganda Singh, Jaswant Singh Jass, M.M. Ahluwalia and Fauja Singh. Except Dr Ganda Singh, all these writers produced their work under the influence of nationalist historiography portraying Namdhari Guru Ram Singh and his followers as patriots and freedom fighters. They tried to locate the meanings and overtones of concepts like *swadeshi* and non-cooperation in the programme of the Kuka movement under the leadership of Namdhari Guru Ram Singh. Under the patronage of their spiritual masters—Satguru Partap Singh and Satguru Jagjit Singh, the Namdhari writers wrote books on Satguru Ram Singh and Kuka movement reiterating the formulations of nationalist historiography. In this context Bhai Nahar Singh, Bhai Kirpal Singh and Jaswinder Singh retrieved important findings from the archival sources.

In the present work, an attempt has been made to construct life-history of Namdhari Guru Ram Singh on the basis of contemporary sources. The antecedents and events related to him are examined in a chronological order. However, there are some events on which contemporary sources are silent. On such grey areas, oral Namdhari traditions or literature published by them subsequently have been used.

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Note on the Orthography

All Indian-language words which are used in the text of this biography are italicised. The meaning of these words, terms and concepts are either explained in the text itself or in the glossary. All honorifics and 'sect' names are also italicised. Proper names, castes, deities, and names of placed have been left unmarked. Similarly, the proper names, names of places and sects, honorifics, castes and deities which occur in the quotes of the official documents, reports and statements are retained as such.

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Glossary

Abhiasi	:	a person seeking spiritual quest.
Adalit	:	judicial court.
Adi-Granth	:	(the Guru Granth Sahib), the sacred scripture of the Sikhs recorded by Bhai Gurdas at the instructions of Guru Arjan Dev in 1603-4.
Ahankar	:	ego.
Ahuti	:	pouring ghee in the fire-pit while performing *havan*.
Akal Purakh	:	the one beyond Time, God.
Amrit	:	'nectar of immorality', sweetened initiation water used in *amrit sanskar*.
Amritdhari	:	a Sikh who has 'taken amrit'; an initiated member of the Khalsa.
Amrit Vela	:	an ambrosial hour; the last watch of the night (3.00 a.m. to 6.00 a.m.).
Anand-reeti	:	a Sikh custom (marriage).
Anand-vivah	:	the Sikh marriage ceremony.
Ardasan	:	Namdhari Guru's letters.
Avtar	:	an incarnation of a deity, usually Vishnu.
Baba	:	'father', a term of respect applied to holy man.
Bani	:	word of God-works of the Gurus and other poets included in the Sikh sacred scriptures.
Banvas	:	Exile.
Bhagati	:	adoration of a personal God.
Bhai	:	literally a 'brother', also a title of sanctity and respectability among Sikhs.
Bhajan-bandgi	:	meditating in the name of God.
Bhangi-Musla	:	a Muslim (scavenger) of low caste.
Bharais	:	attendants of *Pirkhanas*.
Bhog	:	mortuary rites; the end of a performance.

Bhullan	:	acts of omissions or commissions in observing Sikh practice.
Billas	:	British.
Birs	:	Adi-Granth, volumes; tome, "recension".
Bhut	:	evil spirit.
Chabutra	:	platform.
Chadar Dalna/ Chadar Andazi	:	a form of remarriage throwing of a sheet over the couple about to be married.
Chandi da Path	:	reading of *Chandi*, a composition attributed to Guru Gobind Singh.
Chauri	:	fly-whisk.
Churel	:	female evil spirit.
Dan	:	charity.
Dai	:	nurse.
Dain	:	sorceress.
Damari	:	coin.
Dargah	:	court.
Dastar	:	turban.
Daswandh	:	one-tenth donation of earning.
Desh-Bhagati	:	patriotism.
Dhadi	:	bard.
Dhadi-Jathas	:	groups of bards.
Dharamsala	:	place of worship for early Sikh Panth (later Gurdwara).
Dharma	:	appropriate moral and religious obligations.
Dholak and Chhehane	:	drum and cymbals.
Doshala	:	woollen robe.
Firanghee	:	British.
Gadka	:	a traditional mode of wielding sword.
Gao-badh	:	cow killing.
Gatha	:	story.
Giani	:	a Sikh scholar or theologian.
Gotras	:	exogamous caste grouping within zat.
Granthi	:	custodian of a Gurdwara, the professional reader of Guru Granth Sahib; the functionary in-charge of a Gurdwara.
Grihastha	:	a house-hold life.
Gur-gatha	:	story of guru.
Gulabdasi	:	a follower of Gulabdasi sect.

Gurmantra : a mystical formula given by a guru to a disciple.

Gurmaryada : the ethical principles and practices in accordance with the teachings of the Guru; the tradition set by the Gurus for the Sikhs.

Guru/Gooroo : a spiritual preceptor, either a person or the mystical 'voice' of God.

Guru-sabda : from the Guru's mouth.

Gurusikh : a 'Sikh of the Guru'; a devout Sikh.

Haq : a right; a rightful claim.

Havan : ritual fire ceremony practised by the Namdhari Sikhs, also called a *hom*.

Haveli : a residence in walled courtyard.

Holla : the festival, celebrated by the Sikhs.

Hukka : a device of smoking tobacco.

Ilaqa : a territory, an estate, jurisdiction.

Inam : literally, a reward: an assignment of revenue distinct from *jagir* and *dharmarth*, and implying the idea of reward.

Isnan : bath.

Jadu-toona : witchcraft.

Jagiasi : a person desirous of knowledge and spiritual insight.

Janeu : a sacred thread of a Hindu.

Japu : Guru Gobind Singh's introductory invocation in the *Dasam Granth*.

Japuji : Guru Nanak Dev's composition.

Kachh : a pair of breeches which must not extend below the knees worn as one of the five Ks.

Kakkars : the names of Sikh emblems begin with the letter "Kakka" of the Gurmukhi script, they are known as the five Kakkars: kes, kangha, kirpan, kachha, kara.

Kalam : Islamic fundamental.

Kalyuga : the fourth cosmic age, associated with utter degeneration in all walks of life.

Kam : sexuality.

Kammi/kamins : literally, inferior; the village workmen such as sweepers, potters, cobblers, water-drawers, barbers and washermen.

Kangha : a wooden comb, worn as one of the five Ks.
Kanungo : a hereditary keeper of the revenue records at the pargana level.
Kara : a steel wrist-ring worn on the right wrist as one of the five Ks.
Karah Parsad : sacramental food.
Kardar : an agent; an official; a revenue collector of a ta'alluqa.
Kareva : a marriage by mutual consent without performance of any ceremony whatsoever.
Kar-sewa : a community-service.
Karodh : anger.
Katha : exegesis of the Guru's verses.
Kes : uncut hair, retained as one of the five Ks.
Keshdhari : a Sikh who retains the kes (hair).
Khanaqah : a religious establishment, generally of the Sufi recluse.
Khande-di-Pahul : Khalsa initiation in which water sweetened with soluble sweets is stirred with a two edged sword, *amrit, pahul.*
Khufia : secret.
Kirtan : devotional singing.
Kirtania : a devotional singer.
Koor : falsehood.
Kutha : meat from an animal killed in the Muslim style.
Laja : honour.
Langar : the kitchen/refectory attached to every Gurdwara from which food is served to all regardless of caste or creed; the meal served from such a kitchen.
Lavan : circumambulating the Guru Granth Sahib or a sacred fire as part of a marriage ceremony.
Lobh : greed.
Lohar : blacksmith.
Malechh : an uncouth barbarian; and outsider with whom no association is desirable, a foreign invader, an untouchable.
Mangla-Charan : a introductory invocation.

Manji : a Sikh preaching centre established by Guru Amar Dass—the third Guru, or the person in charge of a Sikh preaching centre.

Mantra : a verse, phrase, or syllable of particular religious import; also used by Hindu.

Minas : the followers of a dissenting Sikh sect.

Moh : infatuation.

Mona Sikh : a clean-shaven Sikh.

Nai : barber.

Naib-Suba : deputy-governor.

Nam : the divine Name, a summary term expressing the total being of Akal Purakh.

Nazarana : the tribute paid by a vassal; also paid by an official on a regular basis or on special occasions.

Nirmala : "a pure one": a sect of Sikhs originated during the time of Guru Gobind Singh.

Nit-nem : daily reciting gurbani in the morning and evening.

Paharua : a person who drives away five evils (*kam, karodh, moh, lobh* and *ahankar*).

Pagree : turban

Panthic-parampara : a tradition of Sikh community.

Parcharak : preacher.

Pathi : scripture reader.

Patii : a part or portion of a village, generally being the sub-division of a *taraf;* a share in a village

Pipal : ficus religosia.

Pir : Muslim saint.

Pirkhanas : minor shrines of Muslim Pirs.

Pitras and Jetheiras : clan ancestors.

Pothi : volume, a term used for scriptural manuscripts in the early Sikh community.

Pun-dan : sacred acts of charity.

Rababi : one who plays on the *rabab* (a kind of violin with three strings).

Raga : metrical mode.

Rahit : Sikh code of practice.

Rahitnama : a manual of rahet, principles.

Sadhu : a person devoted to religious pursuits.
Sakhi : an anecdote.
Samagari : material used for performing *havan*.
Sangat : religious groups of Sikhs; a congregation.
Sant : a pious person; a renowned teacher of Gurmat; an adherent of the Sant tradition.
Sankh : shell.
Sarangi : a stringed instrument.
Sarbrah : manager of Harminder Sahib appointed by the then Deputy Commission of Amritsar.
Sarovar : sacred tank.
Satguru : true spiritual master.
Satsang : true association; singing hymns in praise of God in congregation.
Satsangis : who participate, singing hymns in praise of God in congregation.
Satjug : the 'Age of Truth, the first and best of the cosmic eras which follows the Kaliyuga in the cosmic cycle.
Sep : generally the grain given for the service rendered by the village artisans and menials.
Sepi : one who renders the service called sep and receives the customary remuneration.
Sehajdhari : a Sikh who does not observe Khalsa conventions.
Sharaa : Islamic law.
Shaheed : martyr.
Siana : a wise person/ a medicine practitioner.
Siropa : literally, from head to foot; a dress of honour.
Sir-gum : those who shave their heads.
Sir-Karta : head of an institution.
Sikh Qaum : Sikh community.
Slottar : lathi.
Smadh : the site of a cremation.
Soorma : hero.
Sampuran Kalan : possessing knowledge of sixteen attributes of *Ishvar*.
Taksal : the royal treasury; a seminary.
Tankhah : a penance, for a violence of the Rahit.
Tankhahia : a transgressor against the Rahit.

Tamba-tehmat : a rural Punjabi dress.
Tap-asthan : a place for meditation.
Tarkhan : carpenter.
Teesra Panth : third Panth.
Thagi : cheating.
Thanedar : in-charge of a police station.
Tikana : place, a Sikh seminary.
Udasis : adherent of the Udasi Panth (an order of ascetic Sikhs).
Vahiguru : praise to the guru, the modern Sikh name for God.
Var : a poetic form; an *Adi Granth* arrangement consisting of stanzas with preceding *shaloks*.
Vatta-satta : a practice of exchanging girls in marriage.
Yagya-havan : ritual fire ceremony practised by the Namdhari Sikhs, also called *hom*.
Zamindar : a landlord, proprietor or an occupant of land.
Zat : endogamous caste-grouping.

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1

NAMDHARI GURU'S CONTEMPORARIES

Before the annexation of the Kingdom of Lahore, the Sikh *Darbaris, Ahalkars* and *Jagirdars* enjoyed hegemony in the state structure. "Nearly 60 percent of them were Sikhs, while the Sikhs formed less than 10 percent of the total population. The majority of the Sikh members were Jat, largely from the districts of Amritsar, Lahore, Gujranwala, Sialkot and Gurdaspur which constituted the core region of the kingdom. Among the non-Jats were Khatris, Brahmans, *tarkhans* and *nais*. Nearly one-fourth of the ruling class was Hindu, which corresponded broadly to their general proportion in the total population. But the majority of these were Khatris and Brahmans from the core region. There were about a dozen Muslim members of the ruling class. The most important and the most influential of these were the Faqir brothers who belonged to Lahore."[1]

Similarly, there were a large number of Sikh and Hindu *adalatis* who replaced the *qazis*. However, a greater number of *kardars* and *kanungos* came from the Muslims. Maharaja Ranjit Singh himself created a big number of Sikh and non-Sikh nobles. Important among these nobles were Hari Singh Nalwa, Mit Singh Padhania, Gurmukh Singh Lamba and those from families like Attariwala and Majithia. Among the important Sikh *Jagirdars* were Sardar Lehna Singh Majithia, Sardar Nihal Singh Ahluwalia, Sardar Sham Singh, Sardar Chattar Singh Attariwala, Sardar Shamsher Singh Sandhanwalia, Sardar Arjun Singh, Prince Pishaura Singh, Prince Tara Singh, Sardar Jawahar Singh, Sardar Mangal

Singh, Sardar Fateh Singh Mann, Sardar Attar Singh Kalanwala, Sardar Hukam Singh Malwai and Sardar Bela Singh Mokal.[2]

After the annexation of Lahore, the colonial rulers introduced radical administrative, economic and cultural changes which had direct bearings on the Sikhs who became one of the subjects of the colonial rule. The former Sikh *Sardars, Jagirdars, Ahalkars* and *Zamindars* had to readjust and reorient their role under the colonial rule and also their relationship with the new masters. The latter changed that civil and military structures of the Kingdom of Lahore in which the Sikh *Darbaris, Sardars* and *Ahalkars* had to lose their respective status and positions. Lord Dalhousie, the British Governor-General, formed the Board of Administration comprising of three members: Henry Lawrence, John Lawrence and Charles Grenville Mansel. Henry Lawrence was appointed the President of the Board and entrusted with matters connected with defence and relations with the *Sardars* while his brother, John Lawrence, was put in charge of land settlement. Charles Grenville Mansel, a covenanted civilian, was entrusted with the administration of justice. After a year, he was replaced by Robert Montgomery. The Board was put directly under the control of the Governor General.

The two regions comprising cis-Sutlej and trans-Sutlej were reunited. The total area covered was 73,000 square miles and its population was about 10 million. The entire area was split into seven divisions, each under a Commissioner with headquarters at Ambala, Jalandhar, Lahore, Jhelum, Rawalpindi, Leiah and Multan. The divisions were further divided into districts controlled by 29 Deputy Commissioners and 43 Assistant Commissioners. The districts of Hazara, Peshawar and Kohat formed another division in 1850. Next to the Divisional Commissioners were Deputy Commissioners, followed by Assistant Commissioners and Extra Assistant Commissioners.

The Commissioners and Deputy Commissioners exercised both executive and judicial powers. The Commissioners acted as Superintendents of revenue and police as well as the appellate authority in civil and criminal cases as Sessions judges. The Deputy Commissioners were collectors of revenue and the Magistrates tried civil suits above the value of Rupees 1,000.[3] The British Punjab was demilitarised:

> All military grants of Sikh times were abolished. 1,19,796 arms—swords and matchlocks, a few pieces of cannon, rifles and other weapons—were recovered. The Guide Corps were raised to maintain peace in the frontier areas. Ten regiments, five cavalry and five infantry were also raised for internal security. Some of the *Darbar's* soldiers were absorbed into these regiments. A military police force was recruited. It comprised 8,000 men, largely Punjabi Muslims. A secret intelligence *(khufia)* service was attached to the police. The old village watch-and-ward system was revived.[4]

Loss of power affected the Sikhs in ways more than one: the landed aristocracy lost its status, power and wealth and the demilitarisation of the Khalsa army made the economic condition of the Sikh peasantry worse. Loss of power and wealth ceased to keep the Hindus in the fold of Sikhism. Besides, under the patronage of the British officials the Christian Missionaries launched a movement of Evangelicalism, making Sikhs their special targets. They hoped that if they could convert Sikhs to Christianity, they would become the soldiers of the Cross, as brave and true and faithful to Christ as they have been...to their own Maharajas. In the initial stage, the missionaries concentrated their Evangelical activities in the Sikh dominated Majha tract. Their most significant achievement was the conversion of Maharaja Dalip Singh, the last successor of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The Maharaja's conversion was hailed as the first instance of the accession of an Indian prince to the

communion of the church. The conversion provoked the Sikhs, particularly when the missionaries publicly denounced the *Adi-Granth*—the Sikh scripture—as the scripture of the heathens.[5]

Namdhari Guru Ram Singh was aware of the crisis in which the Sikhs were entangled since the demise of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1839) and was more perturbed over the moral depravity among the Sikh *Sardars, Ahalkars* and *Jagirdars*. He held them responsible for the downfall of the Khalsa Raj. Similarly, he was aware of the new challenges posed by the Christian missionaries. The latter had their main headquarters at Ludhiana which was not far from his own native village. At the same time, he watched the Evangelical activities of these missionaries and learnt their skills of propagation of Christianity.

I

To regain their previous status and position, the Sikhs had to prove their loyalty to the colonial masters. Understanding the relevance of the former landed aristocracy and the priestly classes, in the process of consolidation of Raj, the colonial masters took several administrative measures to accommodate the landed Sikh aristocracy. The hereditary territories of the Sikh *Sardars* and *Jagirdars* were restored to them. In the post-Uprising of 1857, the British made serious efforts to make these *Sardars* and *Jagirdars*, the allies of the Raj. The colonial masters strengthened the feudal basis of the society. The interests of the Sikh *Sardars* and *Jagirdars* were integrated with those of the British empire.

At the *Darbar* held by Governor-General Lord Canning in February 1860 at Lahore, he made known the intention of his government to invest outstanding chiefs and *Jagirdars* with the 'judicial, revenue and police jurisdiction' and further to 'consolidate their *jagirs*'. Accordingly in 1860,

> for the first time, the selected chiefs and *Jagirdars* were made Honorary Magistrates. Thus the basis of a feudal society was strengthened.[6]

Village *panchayats* were allowed to deal with the less important matters related to the rural community. In cities, Town Councils were constituted to advise and assist British magistrates on civil matters.

This basic administrative structure continued but with certain changes. The Punjab was declared Lieutenant Governor's province in the post-Uprising of 1857. Subsequently, Lieutenant Governor's Council, the Rural Boards and Municipal Committees came into being.

In terms of political behaviour, the British government put the entire Sikh as well as non-Sikh landed aristocracy into two categories. In the first category were those aristocrats who allied themselves with the British during the two Anglo-Sikh wars. These aristocrats continued to render loyal services to the British Raj. The second category belonged to those aristocrats who refused to accept the British Raj and showed resistance for some time. Their number however was relatively smaller as compared to that of the loyalists. The Board of Administration of Punjab took punitive measures to contain the activities of the dissenting chiefs and aristocrats. After some time they realised the futility of their resistance. The Uprising of 1857 gave them an opportunity to prove their loyalist credentials. In 1865, Lepel Griffen enumerated 250 families who were considered as having 'rank, wealth and local influence'. "Nearly 50 percent of these families were Sikhs, 25 percent Hindus and nearly 20 percent Muslims. It also needs to be pointed out that the proportion of Jats among the Sikhs was highest (*sic*) than any other group among the members of the aristocracy."[7] Irrespective of their religious background, the British government groomed the landed aristocracy and awarded them with titles, seals of honour in the pageantry

of *Darbars*. Like their counterparts, the Sikh aristocracy constituted an important section of Viceregal *Darbar*, Provincial *Darbar* and the Divisional and District *Darbars*.[8] Some of them were appointed as Honorary Magistrates and Extra Assistant Commissioners. A few of them were also enrolled in the armed forces with honorary titles like Captain etc.

II

Next to the Sikh aristocracy were the Sikh priestly classes. The British officials understood that like the landed aristocracy these classes could also become their allies. For controlling the management of the Gurdwaras the British allowed the Sikh priests of some of the historical shrines of Amritsar, Anandpur and Tarn Taran to retain a large portion of their endowments in 1851-52. The British took another significant step when they allowed *Mahants* and *Pujaris* to register the lands and properties of the Gurdwaras in their names. The management of some of the historical Gurdwaras was also put under the control of a government nominee known as the *Sarbrah*. In this connection, the control of the Golden Temple (also known as Harmandir Sahib) needs special mention. The early British administrators of Punjab knew the importance of the Harmandir Sahib, as the great national temple of the Sikhs. They also knew that the temple was a huge complex consisting of the Harmandir Sahib, the Akal Takhat, the Jhanda Bunga, the Shahid Bunga and a large number of other Bungas situated all around the sacred tank. They realised that by controlling the Golden Temple they could control over the entire body of the Khalsa. To ensure that the temple remained free from the political intrigues and religious fanaticism, the British established official control over the institution through the Extra Assistant Commissioner as its *Sarbrah*. A certain degree of

neutrality was imposed upon the temple through the Head *Granthi* as the *Sarbrah's* appointee. Neither the *Pujaris* nor the committee of *Sardars* had any right to manage its affairs. The main advantage of the new arrangement was the maintenance of the status quo. At the same time, the actual arrangement ensured that this premier institution of the Sikhs should remain under the influence of the loyalists. But the above mentioned *Mahants* and *Pujaris* refused to give due respect to the Namdhari Guru whenever he visited the Golden Temple.

Next to the *Mahants* and *Pujaris* were the Bedis and Sodhis who were confronted by the Namdhari Guru Ram Singh for their exploitative activities. The Sodhis and Bedis were the descendents of the Sikh Gurus. They commanded great respect; some even came to be worshipped in the same manner as the Sikh Gurus and were widely venerated by the populace. Moreover, they played a significant role in the administrative, political and military affairs of the Sikh state. The Sodhis of Anandpur were too powerful to be ignored by the Sikh chieftains including Maharaja Ranjit Singh. It is said that no military campaign was successful in the cis-Satluj area without the co-operation of Sodhis of Anandpur. They thrived on the offerings of the Sikh devotees and extensive revenue-free land grant from the Sikh chiefs. A British Settlement Officer in Hoshiarpur district gave a graphic picture of the lifestyle of the Sodhis of Anandpur particularly on the occasion of the holy festival.

> The Sodhis come on their elephants and caparisoned horses and move through the crowds, and the *Bari Sarkar* on an elephant, with a *chauri* (fly-whisk) waving over his head. They receive the obeisance of the people and accept offerings. Some 30,000 people participate. In the evening they move slowly towards the town and are carried back as if in triumph to their respective shrines; and at sunset the crowds melt away, and many of the worshippers move homewards.[9]

Some of the Sodhis had also established their *deras*. Important among them were Sodhis of Guru Harsahai in Ferozepur district and of Kartarpur in Jalandhar district. Since they had holy relics in their possession they held annual fairs for the display of these relics to the devotees. Thousands of followers attended the fairs. These Sodhis exercised powerful influence in the areas of Doaba and Malwa regions.

Equally powerful were Bedis of Rawalpindi and Una districts. Sahib Singh Bedi of Una enjoyed a unique status during Maharaja Ranjit Singh's period. He accompanied the Maharaja on several expeditions. He also performed coronation ceremonies at Lahore. He was the religious mentor of Ranjit Singh who gave endowments with huge *jagirs*. However, Sahib Singh Bedi opposed the British during the Anglo-Sikh wars. In fact, he resisted the British Raj even after the annexation of the Lahore kingdom. For that reason, he was severely punished. On the other hand, Baba Khem Singh Bedi became an ally of the British. His headquarters were in Rawalpindi. He exercised an extensive influence in the area of Rawalpindi, Attock, Lyallpur and Shahpur. He was born in Kulgram of district Hoshiarpur on 21 February 1832. He was the son of Baba Attar Singh Bedi. His family claimed to be the descendants of Guru Nanak Dev and he carried the aura of a spiritual leader. He inherited huge landed property comprising of eight thousand acres and was awarded with 14,000 acres of land in Montgomery district, out of which 3,000 acres was revenue free.[10]

Bhai Arjan Singh, head of Bagarian family, was widely respected as a traditional leader in the Malwa region. He was the son of Bhai Kishan Singh and got his early education under the tutelage of his uncle Bhai Narain Singh. Bhai Arjan Singh was well versed in modern Indian and classical languages. He inherited a huge estate, comprising of palatial headquarters and big land holdings. Besides being a landed aristocrat, he was acknowledged as a religious mentor by

the Sikh ruling chiefs of Patiala, Nabha, Jind, Faridkot, Kapurthala and Kalsia states. He also inherited the status of Bhais of Bagarian who were blessed by the Sikh Gurus. He and his ancestors presided over the religious and social ceremonies in the Sikh princely families.

> He himself administered the rites of initiation to Maharaja Bhupinder Singh of Patiala and Maharaja Ripudaman Singh of Nabha, and installed the latter on the throne after the death of his father, Maharaja Sir Hira Singh in 1911. Bhai Arjan Singh was chosen to be the first President of the Chief Khalsa Diwan established on 30 October 1902, serving in that capacity for nearly 15 years. In 1934, he presided over the *Sarab Hind Sikh Samparadai* Conference at Bhaini Sahib and in 1938 presided over the 27th Sikh Educational Conference at Amritsar. He was awarded by the British government with the title of *Sardar Bahadur* in 1916, and, in June 1919, the Order of the British Empire was also conferred upon him. He served as President of the *Khalsa Pratinidhi Diwan*, Ludhiana, and a member of the Amritsar Khalsa College Managing Committee as well as of the *Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee*. Bhai Arjan Singh died at Bagarian on 8 November 1946.[11]

It were the ancestors of Bhai Arjan Singh who propagated Sikhism in district Ludhiana and brought the ancestors of Namdhari Guru Ram Singh into the fold of Sikhism.

III

Sants, Babas and Bhais

Apart from the landed Sikh aristocracy and priestly class, there were several *sants* and *babas* who headed *deras* in different areas of Punjab. Some of the *sants* and *babas* were contemporaries of Namdhari Gurus—Balak Singh and Ram Singh. The latter interacted with some of these *sants* and

babas and imbibed their spiritual and temporal traditions. By virtue of their mystical experience and miraculous powers, they were worshipped by the Sikh masses for they listened to their mundane problems too. They were normally seen as those who meditated in the *nam* of God for years together, overcame their worldly desires and attained a stage of bliss; some of them claimed to have achieved mystical union with God Himself. Manifestation of God Himself was through His immanence in His creation and in particular, through His indwelling within human soul. It was there that He, by grace, revealed Himself. In this state of bliss, they found that performing rituals and ceremonies were useless. Only meditation on the divine *nam* was although difficult but the true path. Any person who was prepared to undergo sufferings and difficulties, they believed, could discover the inward way to God. They attached great importance to the Guru who might be a human teacher or who might be understood not as a person but as the inner voice of God. They did not attach any value to celibacy or asceticism.[12]

By and large, *Sants* and *Babas* of the above mentioned categories claimed to have attained mystical experiences. They claimed that they represented *Panthic-parampara* which comprised two components, *sewa* and *simran*. The former refers to the service of the community while the latter personifies a meditation in the name of God. *Simran* without *sewa* may make a person arrogant, selfish and a tyrant. Therefore, *sewa* and *simran* were integrated components of *sant-sampardai* which was founded by Bhai Daya Singh. He was one of the 'five beloved' of the Khalsa created by the tenth Guru Gobind Singh.[13] Nevertheless, in spite of the observation of this *parampara*, the *Sants* and *Babas* evolved distinctive *maryada* of their respective *deras*. Baba Bir Singh with his *dera* at Naurangabad was seen as the protagonist of this *parampara* set forth by Bhai Daya Singh. Baba Bir Singh was born in July 1768 at village Gaggobua, in Amritsar. His father was a soldier in the army of Lahore *Darbar* and

participated in several military campaigns. After the death of his father, Bir Singh too joined the Lahore army but left it after sometime as he came under the influence of Baba Bhag Singh who was a religious leader in Quri, in Rawalpindi district. In response to the teachings of Baba Bhag Singh, Bir Singh set up a *dera* in Naurangabad, a village near Tarn Taran. His *dera* came to be known as Santpura which became a popular pilgrimage centre. It is said that around 4,500 visitors ate food in the community kitchen of this *dera*. More interestingly, Bhai Bir Singh acquired a volunteer army of 1,200 musketeers and 3,000 horses. Bhai Bir Singh and his predecessors were closely associated with the Sikh Raj. However, when after the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh the civil war broke out, a large number of Sikh soldiers and peasantry sought Baba Bir Singh's guidance. In 1844, Sardar Ajit Singh Sandhawalia, along with his associates, took shelter with the British but later came back to Baba Bir Singh's *dera*. Already Prince Kashmira Singh and Prince Pishaura Singh and many Sikh *Sardars* including Jawahar Singh Nalwa (son of Hari Singh Nalwa) had taken asylum at Bir Singh's *dera*. In the wake of the conflict between these Sikh *Sardars* and Dogra brothers, Baba's *dera* became a centre of Sikh revolt against the Dogra dominance. Hira Singh, the Dogra Prime Minister, felt panicky at this development and attacked the *dera*. It is said that Bhai Bir Singh forbade the soldiers of the Sikh *Sardars* to resist the Dogra army. But having scant respect for Baba Bir Singh, the Dogra army still attacked the *dera*. Consequently, Baba Bir Singh, Prince Kashmira Singh, Attar Singh and a large number of Sikh soldiers including the Baba's followers lost their lives. In the eyes of the Khalsa, this act of the Dogra army was unpardonable. The Khalsa Fauj took revenge against the Dogras and eliminated Hira Singh.

After the death of Baba Bir Singh, Bhai Maharaj Singh became the head of this *dera*. His actual name was Nihal Singh. He belonged to village Rabbon, in district Ludhiana.

We do not have adequate information about his early career except the facts that he had a religious bent of mind and was influenced by Bhai Bir Singh who was the witness to the gory affairs of the Lahore *Darbar*, particularly the killing of his religious mentor (Bhai Maharaj Singh). He was convinced that it was not the anarchy of the soldiers alone but also the perfidy of the British which deliberately allowed the political and administrative machinery of the Lahore kingdom to degenerate. He made up his mind to fight back the evil forces which were eroding the foundation of the Khalsa Raj. His revolutionary career started with the Prema Conspiracy Case, involving him in the plot to murder the British resident, Henry Lawrence and other pro-British officers of the Lahore *Darbar*. Apprehensive of his political potential, the British restricted his movements to Naurangabad. The British took this action when they noted that Bhai Maharaj Singh had moved his headquarters to Samdu-ka-Talab. Knowing that he could be arrested, at any time, Maharaj Singh went underground. He surfaced again when he supported the cause of Diwan Mul Raj, Governor of Multan, which strengthened the hands of Attariwalas. He was apprehended in December 1849 along with twenty-one comrades when they were busy in giving final touches to the plan of attacking the British treasuries and cantonments. The Board of Administration recommended the removal of Bhai Maharaj Singh from Punjab, under Regulation III of the Act of 1818. On 30 January 1850, he was despatched to Calcutta along with Diwan Mul Raj. From Calcutta he was deported to Singapore on 15 May 1850. He remained there for about six years in the Singapore jail and breathed his last on 5 July 1856.[14]

In fact, Bhai Bir Singh, Bhai Maharaj Singh and Bhai Ram Singh personified the holy Sikh tradition.

Etymologically the word *bhai* means brother, but in the early Sikh tradition the word was also used as an honorific for the holy men of the *Panth*. To qualify for this title a

person had to interpret the *Adi-Granth*, communicate the wisdom of the gurus it enshrined, and be publicly recognised for his piety. In addition, he could work miracles, heal the sick and give succour to the distressed, he was sure to occupy a position of considerable reverence and influence within the community. Such fully realised men were sometimes also honoured with the appellation *Baba*, and rarely *Guru*. The last term in the nineteenth century was more often used for those Bedis, Sodhis and Nirmalas who performed the Sikh initiation rites. However, in the nineteenth century the epithet *bhai* was also used for men who acted as professional *granthis* or readers of the *Adi-Granth*.[15]

Several miracles are ascribed to Bhai Bir Singh and Bhai Maharaj Singh. For instance, it is said that

> the *langar* run by the establishment of Bir Singh never ran short of food even when a large number of people turned up. Through his miraculous powers Maharaj Singh simply increased the quantity of cooked food to meet the exigency. In the winter of 1849 when Henri Vansittart, the Deputy Commissioner of Jalandhar, arrested Bhai Maharaj Singh for his anti-British campaigns, he despatched a report to his superiors with this comment: "The Gooroo (Bhai Maharaj Singh) is not an ordinary man. He is to the Natives what Jesus Christ is to the most zealous of Christians. His miracles were seen by tens of thousands and are more implicitly relied on, than those worked by the ancient prophets."[16]

We shall note that the process of ascribing power of miracles exercised by Namdhari Guru Ram Singh was started by Sant Santokh Singh Bahowal in his work *Satguru Bilas*.[17] In fact, Namdhari Guru Ram Singh emulated Sikh tradition invoked by Bhai Maharaj Singh to mobilise the Sikh *Sardars, Jagirdars*, peasantry and the artisan classes against the British. Similarly, he had powers to show miracles.

Moreover, Bhai Maharaj Singh also approached Sikh priests and *Mahants*, like "Bhai Nihal Singh and Bhai Kishan Singh who had a large following in the North-West, the priests of the Golden Temple, Amritsar, Mahant Dewan Singh of the Malwa region across Sutlej and Mastgir Gossain in the Punjab hills."[18] Similarly, he enjoyed the blessings of Sahib Singh Bedi of Una. Above all, Bhai Maharaj Singh approached the Sikh soldiers in the British cantonments. His emergence as a saint soldier was a serious threat to the founding of British Raj in Punjab. In our context the important thing is that Bhai Maharaj Singh left the anti-British legacy which was picked up by Namdhari Guru Ram Singh and his followers. For thousands of Sikhs both Bhai Maharaj Singh and Baba Ram Singh were Gurus.

Baba Balak Singh, the spiritual master of Namdhari Guru Ram Singh, imbibed those *Sehajdhari* traditions which were propagated by the *Sewa Panthi* sect. The sect was one of the oldest sects which represented the tradition of *sant-sampardai*. Its founder was Bhai Ram Dayal ji who chose Shahpur (Pakistan) as the centre of his activities. His associate was Adan Shah (1688-1757) who himself founded his *dera* called *tikana*. One of Bhai Adan Shah's successors was Bhai Jit Singh who came to Farooka and started his religious activities there. He founded Dharamsalas in the nearby villages and made arrangements for learning *gurmukhi* and *Gurbani*. He taught *Panj-Granthi* to the children of *Sehajdhari* Sikhs. He also performed *katha* of Suraj Prakash regularly and that of the Hindu Granths occasionally, thus evolving a *maryada* of his *tikana*. Baba Sham Singh, subsequently known as 'Braham Gyani Sant Baba', came from district Shahpur (Pakistan) and joined this *dera*. He was given religious training in the recitation of *gurbani* and taught Sikh scriptures. He also got training in the art of performing *katha* and *kirtan*. Like other followers, he was given simple food and clothing. It is believed that Baba Sham Singh observed the *maryada* of this *tikana* for fifty years. Later

on, he founded his *dera* at Atta Mandi, Amritsar and it came to be known as Dera Baba Sham Singh Ji. He undertook the task of construction of seven Gurdwaras and *sarovars* (sacred tanks). His *kar-sewa* also included the complexes of Darbar Sahibs of Amritsar, Tarn Taran and Anandpur. It was his successor Baba Gurmukh Singh who institutionalised the *kar-sewa*. It was soon taken up by several *sants* and *babas*. However, Baba Sham Singh also set an example of honest and humble living. In his free time, he made ropes and raised some income for his *dera* by selling them in the market.[19] This *dera* produced some prominent exponents of Sikhism and *kirtanias* like Bhai Hira Singh.

Close to the *sewapanthi* traditions, there was *Dera* Nangali Sahib in Jammu. It was founded by Bhai Rocha Singh (1688-1803). He was a holy man and preacher of Sikh faith. He wandered in search of spiritual truth and met several saints. It is said that he met Guru Gobind Singh some time after latter's evacuation of Anandpur in December 1705 and received from him the rites of initiation. Guru Gobind Singh instructed him to go back to his country and preach Guru Nanak's word. He met Sant Panjab Singh, a Sikh saint in his *dera* on the bank of river Jhelum in Muzaffarabad district. Recognising Rocha Singh's piety, service and dedication, Sant Panjab Singh nominated him as his successor in 1736. Rocha Singh constructed a Gurdwara and brought a large number of people into the Khalsa fold. In mid 18th century he raised 300 to 400 armed followers. He made extensive tours of districts Hazara and Attock. He established several Gurdwaras in Pothohar region and also disseminated the knowledge of *gurmukhi* and training in reading and reciting *Guru Granth Sahib*.[20]

In early 20th century, Sant Bhai Mohan Singh (1878-1918) became *Mahant* of this *dera*. He undertook the task of propagation of Sikh religion and launched a campaign against the social evils like child marriage and dowry system. He exhorted his followers not to marry their children

within the same *gotras*. Moreover, he maintained communal harmony between the Muslims and Hindus which was occasionally disrupted. Maharaja Partap Singh of Kashmir honoured his social services and gave Mahant Mohan Singh a *siropa* and vested in him some judicial powers. The land of the *dera* was declared revenue-free. The Mahant supported the British and encouraged the Sikhs to join the army during the First World War.

If the *sewapanthis* were the votaries of the *Sehajdhari* traditions, the *Sampardai Taksal* represented itself as the true custodian of the Khalsa *maryada*. Sant Bishan Singh Ji Muralewale imparted vigorous training in the recitation of *Guru Granth Sahib* and understanding of *gurmaryada*. The origin of this *taksal* is also traced in the *Giani sampardai* which is one of three major schools of Sikh theologians and expositors of the Sikh scriptures, the other two being the Udasis and the Nirmalas. Under the leadership of Sant Sundar Singh (1883-1930), the successor of Sant Bishan Singh, this *sampardai* subscribed to the programme of the Sikh reformers. The *taksal* trained more than one thousand and three hundred followers comprising of one thousand *granthis*, two hundred *parcharaks* and the rest *gyanis*. The *taksal* also took the credit of keeping alive the tradition of possessing arms of the Khalsa. Besides, the *taksal* administered *amrit* to ten thousand people at the time of *Jaito-Morcha*. It is also said that Gurdwara Mukatsar was liberated by the followers of the *taksal*. It is interesting to note that Sant Sundar Singh followed a well-established practice of learning Sanskrit along with the study of Sikh scriptures. The other exponents of the *sant-parampara* were Baba Karam Singh, the founder of the *dera* of Hoti Mardan and his successors Sant Baba Aya Singh (1855-1918), Sant Baba Nand Singh (1872-1943), the founder of Nanaksar *dera*, Sant Attar Singh Ji Maharaj, the founder of Mastuana *dera* and his follower Sant Attar Singh (1867-1927) who established the complex of Gurdwara Reru Sahib, Sant

Gurmukh Singh (1849-1947), Sant Attar Singh Atlevale (1937 d) and finally Sant Prem Singh Kokari (b 1887).

The origin of these *deras* synchronised with the beginning of the Nirankari and Namdhari movements. However, these *deras* were independent of the control of the *Singh Sabhas, Diwans* and Chief Khalsa *Diwan*. With the passage of time, these *deras* developed their own distinctive *maryada* as did the Nirankari and Namdhari gurus. Most of the founders of these *deras* came from the ordinary families of business, agricultural and artisan castes. In their adolescence, either they assisted their parents in the traditional calling of their respective families, or served in the army. For instance, Sant Gurmukh Singh, Patiala, and Sant Attar Singh Mastuana, joined the army. It is said that they began to meditate in the name of God and ultimately attained mystical experience. Similar was the case of Namdhari Guru Ram Singh.

As noted earlier, the founders of these *deras* and *tikanas* claimed themselves as the blessed ones of the Sikh Gurus. In fact, they imbibed the tradition of performing *katha* and *kirtan* initiated by the Sikh Gurus themselves. This tradition, it is said, took a definite shape when Guru Arjan Dev edited and annotated *gurbani* in *ragas* in the *Adi-Granth*. Reading the *Adi-Granth* and reciting *sabads* in *ragas* required elementary knowledge of vernacular languages—particularly the gurmukhi script—and training in the classical *ragas*. *Rababis* and *Dhadis* were the earliest musicians who recited *shabads* with the help of instruments like *rabab*—original form of *sarangi* and *dhad*. It is believed that Rai Balwanda and Bhai Satta were the first *rababis* to serve Harmandir Sahib under the patronage of Guru Arjan Dev whose son and successor Guru Hargobind employed Bhai Abdullah and Bhai Natha—the *dhadis* to sing *vars* (heroic ballads). However, it was during Bhai Mani Singh's time that *kirtan* services were regularised in Harmandir Sahib.[21]

Another oldest *dera* was of the *Sewapanthis* which was

located at Farooka. Bhai Jit Singh was its chief during this period. He founded several Dharamsalas in nearby villages and made arrangements for learning. Moreover, he also kept alive the tradition of *katha* and *kirtan* which was respected by the Hindus and Muslims alike. The *dera* was a repository of the *Sehajdhari* tradition which served as the social bank of the *Amritdharis*. The founders of Nirankari and Namdhari missions adapted these traditions according to their respective programmes.

IV

Rahitnamas, Tankhahnamas and Hukamnamas

The Namdhari Guru and Sikhs of the 19th century received traditions regarding God, *Granth* and Guru and practices related to birth, marriage and death from the *Rahitnama, Sakhi* and *Gurbilas* literature. They also received the Sikh traditions as detailed in the Dasam Granth and *Prem Sumarag*. The authorship and dates of these texts are problematic. There are also some basic differences among the authors regarding the meaning of some terms and concepts.[22] Then there were several Sikh sects having their own modes of meditation and codes of conduct. Popular among them were Udasis, Nirmalas and Gulabdasis. Besides, the Sikhs of the 19th century shared the popular beliefs and practices with the Hindus and Muslims.

That the Sikhs received pluralistic Sikh traditions is corroborated by Giani Gian Singh, a Nirmala scholar, who gave his own versions of these traditions towards the end of the 19th century. He mentioned the Rahit of the Khalsa Sikhs, Udasis, Nirmalas, Kuka Sikhs and Nihang Singhs. Incidentally, he does not say anything about the Rahit of the Nirankari Sikhs. Describing the Rahit of the Khalsa Sikhs he said:

"You must always wear a *kachh, kirpan, kes, kangha* (comb),

and *kara* (wristband). You are forbidden to touch meat slaughtered in the Muslim manner (*kutha*), tobacco, and a Muslim woman (*musalli*). Never cut your hair. From today you belong to the Sodhi lineage of the Khatri caste of the Khalsa. Your name is Singh and your abode is Anandpur. Your birth-place is Keshgarh, you are the sons of the one Guru, and you have abandoned your previous status.

Agriculture, trade, warfare, or the work of the pen are the four kinds of life to deal with. Never be slaves, never beg, take no gifts, and do not have fellowship with unbelievers. Do not observe differences of caste. Give and take your daughters in marriage amongst yourselves, thereby forming relationships with other Singhs. Do not contact them with unbelievers. Do not commit theft or pillage (*thagi*), do not engage in slander, telling tales, meanness, or exaggeration. Serve those *sadhus* who are Sikhs, care for the poor, and always listen to readings from the scripture. Apart from *Akal Purakh* and your beloved (Guru) do not bow your head before any goddess, god, Hindu cenotaph, cremation ground, or idol. Daily remember *Vahiguru*, attend a *satsang*, practice with weapons, and pursue learning.

Have nothing to do with these five kinds of people: Minas, Masands, Dhir-malias, Ram-raias, and initiated Sikhs who subsequently cut their hair (*sir-gum*). Likewise, have nothing to do with those who kill their daughters. Have all eating and marriage relationships, birth and death (ceremonies), betrothals, and marriages (only) with those who live according to the guru's tradition. Do not have death or marriage relationships with unbelievers. In this way make the faith of the Khalsa firm. The Guru has declared that for the reform (of society) He has imparted principles and the status of Singhs to the Khalsa. You five are my beloved. Wherever a Sikh offers *karah prasad* in the guru's name he will set aside a portion in your name and distribute it to a *sangat*. In this way (all) is revealed."[23]

The Namdhari Guru and his Sikhs of the 19th century also received the Sikh traditions stated in the *Rahitnamas* of the 18th century. They are as follows: all *Rahitnamas* enjoin that a Sikh should get up early in the morning, take his bath and recite *Japuji* and *Jap*, and see the Guru in the *sangat*. He should attend the evening service and listen *Rahiras* and *Kirtan-Sohila*. The *Rahitnamas* reiterate faith in the Guru and *Guru Granth* and enjoin upon the Sikh to lead a life of a *grihastha*. They ask the followers to express love and compassion to the fellow Sikhs and help to the needy persons. They emphasise that the Sikhs should treat all women other than their wives, as their daughters and mothers. Addressing the women (Sikh), some of the *Rahitnamas* stipulate that they should not bathe naked; ensure personal hygiene and cleanliness while cooking or serving; cover their heads while in *sangat;* learn to read *Guru Granth Sahib* but must not read it in public; and shun vulgar songs and jokes. Above all, they should maintain modesty and chastity.

The *Rahitnamas* lay particular stress on a Sikh to receive the rites of the Khalsa by ceremony of the double-edged sword; should devote himself to *bani* and refrain from backbiting and slander; use *Vahiguruji Ki Fateh* as the form of greeting; must maintain the five symbols of the Sikhs; make pilgrimage to the Sikh holy places; should serve only the Khalsa or engage in agriculture, trade or workshop.[24]

The *Rahitnamas* also deal with rules, and especially those which when breached, attract a religious penalty, *tankhah*. In Sikh terminology one who becomes liable to attract *tankhah* is he who ignores *nam, dan* and *isnan* (glorification of God's name, charity, and holy bath); who regularly does not join the *satsang* or holy fellowship; who allows his mind to wander while sitting among the company of the holy; who expresses hatred for a poor member of the community; who does not bow to the *shabad;* who is selfish and greedy while distributing *Karai. Prasad* or the holy

communion; who puts on the ruler's Turkish turban; who touches a sword with the toe; who dons red apparel; who uses tobacco snuff; who looks lustfully upon women folk; who is easily enraged; who gives a daughter or sister in marriage for money; who wears not the sword; who deprives a helpless person of his money or belongings; who pays not the *dasvandh* or tithe; who bathes not in cold water; who eats supper without reciting the *Rahiras*; who goes to sleep at night without reciting the *Kirtan-Sohila*; who stands not by his word; who combs not his hair twice daily; who ties not his turban afresh everyday; who brushes not his teeth regularly; who slanders others; who eats flesh of an animal slaughtered in the Muslim way; who attends performances by dancing girls; who commits adultery; who gives not to the deserving; who indulges in abuse; who gambles; who earns his livelihood by cheating others; who visits a prostitute. *Rahitnamas* forbid a Sikh to wear a cap or a *janeu*, the sacred thread of a Hindu. They forbid association with *Masands*, with heretic sect called *Minas*, with those who shave their heads or with those who practice female infanticide. The Sikhs must shun idolatory and the worship of graves. They must have faith only in God, the *Guru Granth Sahib* and the Guru Khalsa.[25]

In spite of these injunctions, the common Sikhs described as the *Sanatan Sikhs* strongly believed in the worship of miracles, saints and undertook regular pilgrimages to their shrines. Among those saints was *Sakhi Sarvar*, who was worshipped by the Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims. *Sakhi Sarvar* was known by different names: *Lakhdata* or the giver of lakhs, *Lalanwala* or Lord of the rubies, *Rohinwala* or Lord of the hills. There was a large number of *khanqahs* and *pirkhanas* where seasonal festivals were organised. Thousands of people participated in these fairs. Like the veneration of *pirs*, the people worshipped the animals, particularly, the Gugga-pir who found a special place in the folk-culture. Besides, the Sikhs worshipped

numerous Hindu gods and goddesses. Popular *devis* among the Sikhs were Durga, Kali, Kalka and Sitla Devi. Like their Hindu counterparts, the Sikhs believed and worshipped *pitras* and *jetheiras* (clan ancestors). They built up small shrines in the names of clan ancestors and lit lamps and offered foods on different occasions.[26]

The worship of nature was an old belief in the society inherited over several millennia. *Suraj Devata* and *Dharti-Mata* were reverenced by the Hindus and Sikhs alike. The worship of nature also included rivers and streams. The Khwaja-Pir was the god of water and worshipped for protection from floods and providing water for human survival and irrigation. The nature-worship also included trees and plants like *peepal* and *tulsi*. Moreover, faith and worship of evil-spirits, witchcraft, sorcery and magical healing were also common among the Sikhs. It was believed that the death of men and women under unfortunate circumstances gave rise to evil-spirits. For getting their relatives liberated from *churels* (witch) or *bhoots* (ghosts), the people hired the services of *sianas* or those who exercised supernatural powers to heal the patients.[27]

If we place the beliefs and practices of Baba Dayal and his successors in the context of written Sikh traditions, we find that the mission of Nirankari *Babas* comes under these traditions. The Nirankari *Babas* reiterated their faith in (a) divine monotheism: God is one and formless; (b) faith in Sikh gurus; and (c) faith in the *Adi-Granth*. The Nirankari *babas* gave primacy to Guru Nanak as the saviour of the human beings. God as conceived by Guru Nanak was formless (*Nirankar*). "In the eyes of Baba Dayal the way to this formless God was not through religious intermediaries or pilgrimages but by a constant reading of Sikh sacred texts."[28] Faith in divine monotheism of Nirankari *babas* was a strong reaction to the beliefs and practices of the Hindus and Sikhs. The early Sikh traditions asked the Khalsa Sikhs to perform only those deeds which are in accordance with

the divine name, charity and bathing *(nam, dan, isnan)* or "put your trust in Akal Purakh and escape from transmigration. Do not forsake Akal Purakh and follow some other god or worship some stone. Every Sikh must accept the *Granth* as Guru. Meditate only on the *mantra.* Praise to the guru."[29] However, Nirankari *baba* Darbara Singh made a departure from the early Sikh tradition when he issued *Hukamnama* which referred him and his predecessor Baba Dayal as *Satgurus.*[30] At the same time, Nirankari *babas* reiterated the tradition of *nit-nem* (daily reciting *gurbani* in the morning and evening). The Nirankari *babas* recognised the relevance of *sangat* in spiritual and temporal affairs, performed ceremonies related to birth, marriage and death. They institutionalised meditation in the name of God under their spiritual guidance. They further regularised this practice when they opened their own centres of worship. By doing so, they supplanted the role of traditional religious leaders.

It was in the sphere of observing rituals related to birth, marriage and death that the Nirankari *Babas* made departure from the extant beliefs and practices. On the birth of a child, hymns from the *Adi-Granth* were sung and *prasad* distributed. However, they kept the tradition of *namkaran* after forty-days. The name to the son was taken from the *Adi-Granth.* Nirankari *Babas* dropped several Brahmanical practices that were seen to be observed by the Sikhs.[31] Likewise, they were bold enough to reject a cumbersome structure of Vedic rites on the occasion of marriage. They introduced *Anand* marriage which was certainly the end of the tradition stated in the *Rahitnamas.* Rather, they are silent on this *reeti.* The violation of *Anand-vivah* did not invoke *tankhah.* It is noted that the *Rahitnama* of Bhai Mani Singh simply states that *anand bina vivah na karna.* Citing the *Gurmat Martand,* a Nirankari scholar argues that though *anand* and *ardas* were performed but it was done by a Brahman. The *Vedic reeti* formed an integral part of Sikh marriages even at

the time of the Tenth Master.[32] The *Prem Sumarag* notes that the marriages of the Sikhs were performed by the *Vedic reeti* in the 18th century. The *Sanatan* Sikhs like Baba Khem Singh Bedi accepted this form of marriage and Brahmans were invited to perform the marriage ceremonies.[33]

There are certain practices which are endorsed by the early Sikh traditions but are rejected by the Nirankari *babas*. These are: "treating women as unclean at childbirth; finding auspicious days for marriages and other occasions; the display of the dowry at a marriage; the placing of lighted lamps or *prasad* in the river and the feeding of Brahmans at the time of death; and the acceptance of payment for the performance of ceremonies."[34]

However, there are some practices which both early Sikh traditions and Nirankari *Babas* exhorted their followers to stop. These are female infanticide and adultery or looking lustfully upon women, selling daughters, cheating and earning livelihood by false means, smoking and drinking, idolatry and worship of graves etc. There are strong injunctions against the crime and misdemeanour and sexual morality in the *Rahitnama* literature.

While prescribing beliefs and practices to the followers, the Nirankari *Babas* quoted hymns from the *Adi-Granth* both for accepting and rejecting the beliefs and practices. Although they received the Sikh traditions regarding birth, marriage and death, and ethics guiding the social life yet they did not follow Sikh traditions in regard to the Khalsa's attitude to *sir-gum* (those who shave their heads), Turks and Hindus; nature of Khalsa; weapons of the Khalsa and warfare, dress and outward appearance of a *Keshdhari* Sikh etc.[35] They did not stress on the external form of the Sikhs. Like the Nirankari Baba Dayal, Namdhari Guru Balak Singh, as we shall note, launched his mission of *nam-simran* and also the tirade against the social evils and a mission to lead life according to Sikh *maryada* stated in the Sikh scriptures

and *Rahitnamas*. His successor carried on the programme of social reforms of his predecessor but reiterated his faith in the Khalsa traditions and restoration of the Khalsa Raj.

Notes and References

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8. Awards given to the titled gentry comprised letters of appreciation, cash awards and a variety of tokens, and the titles were Rai Bahadur, Sardar Bahadur and Khan Bahadur.
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13. Joginder Singh, *Sikh Leadership*, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 1999, p 75.
14. Khushwant Singh, pp 64, 73, 81, 91, 94 and 101; Harbans Singh, *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. III, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1997, p 15.
15. Harjot Oberoi, p 118.
16. *Op.cit.*, pp 121-22.
17. See Jaswinder Singh (Ed.), *Satguru Bilas*, Pt. I & II, Namdhari Darbar. Sri Bhaini Sahib, Ludhiana, Punjab, 2002.

18. For detail, see M.L. Ahluwalia, "Bhai Maharaj Singh and His Role in the Freedom Struggle", *Punjab and the Freedom Struggle* (Ed. Param Bakhshish Singh and Devinder Kumar Verma), Punjabi University, Patiala, pp 51-62.
19. Joginder Singh, p 76.
20. Harbans Singh (chief editor), *The Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. III, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1997, pp 505-06.
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23. Cited in W.H. McLeod, *Sikhs of the Khalsa*, Oxford, 2005, pp 47-48.
24. For detail, see, Harbans Singh (Ed.), *The Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. III, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1997, pp 427-430.
25. *Ibid.*
26. Harjot Oberoi, pp 161-171.
27. *Ibid.*
28. *Ibid, op.cit.*, p 193.
29. W.H. McLeod, *op.cit.*, pp 83, 88.
30. John C.B. Webster, *The Nirankari Sikhs*, Macmillan, Delhi, 1979, p 13.
31. *Ibid.*
32. Man Singh Nirankari and Dewan Singh (Eds), *Baba Dayal*, Amritsar, 1995, p 14.
33. *Ibid.*, p 53.
34. John C.B. Webster, *op.cit.*, p 13.
35. For the details of attributes of *Rahitnamas/tankhahnama*, see, W.H. McLeod. *Sikhs of the Khalsa*, Oxford, 2003.

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2

SOCIAL BACKGROUND

Namdhari Guru Ram Singh was born in February 1816 on the night of the Basant Panchami at village Bhaini Arayian. His father Jassa Singh was a carpenter belonging to Matharu sub-caste. According to genealogy of Namdhari Guru Ram Singh, his ancestors originally belonged to Bangalore and they moved to Alwar state in Rajasthan, most likely for earning their livelihood. Their ancestral occupation was carpentry and iron-smithy. From Alwar they moved to the village Vadi Lalton in district Ludhiana. The earliest ancestor mentioned in the Namdhari literature was Harsa who used to manufacture iron implements. Harsa's grandson was Baba Ladha who was married to the daughter of a wealthy carpenter of village Thikreewal. Carpenter Baba Ladha was the grandfather of Namdhari Guru Ram Singh.

The residents of the village Arayian comprised *zamindars* of sub-caste Rai. For the purpose of agriculture, these *zamindars* required the services of artisans. It is said that the *lambardars* and *zamindars* of this village approached Baba Ladha to provide skilled labour to the village permanently. Responding to their request, Baba Ladha sent his two sons Natha Singh and Jassa Singh along with their families. As per the custom, these new *sepidars** were provided a piece of land for constructing their houses. The arrival of these *sepidars* facilitated the process of founding a new village known as Bhaini Bhundar. According to the oral tradition, Bhundar was a *zamindar* of village Arayian, who with other *zamindars*, built their own houses at Bhaini

Bhundar. It is said that after the death of Baba Bhundar, the *Zamindars* did not stay back at Bhaini Bhundar. It was another *Zamindar* namely Alha who rehabilitated the village and it was known as Bhaini Alha in the early nineteenth century.[1]

According to another tradition, the ancestors of Namdhari Guru Ram Singh were brought into the fold of Sikhism by the famous Bagarian family of Malwa. This family carried on the propagation of Sikhism since the time of the seventh guru, Guru Har Rai, who visited the Malwa region of Punjab.[2] Jassa Singh and his wife Sada Kaur, imbibed Sikhism from their respective parents. Sada Kaur was the daughter of a carpenter of village Nanglan. She instilled Sikh traditions in her son Ram Singh. She also taught *gurmukhi* script to him. Ram Singh memorised *gurbani* in his early years. It is said that he was sent for formal learning to a *dharamsala* in the nearby village Bilga. However, Ram Singh was not inclined to carry on this type of training. The villagers respected both Jassa Singh and his wife for their simplicity and religiosity. The elderly people sought advice from Baba Jassa on several occasions.[3]

The style and pattern of Namdhari Guru Ram Singh letters (popularly referred to as *Hukamnamas* by the Namdhari followers) show that he was well versed in writing the *gurmukhi* script which was in vogue in the 19th century in Punjab. These letters also show that he accompanied Udasis and Nirmalas for a while. Ultimately he got *Khande-di-Pahul* and meditated in the name of God. Incidentally, we have a writing of Santokh Singh Bahowal who was a follower of Namdhari Guru Ram Singh. Although, Santokh Singh has given a brief account of the early life of Namdhari Guru yet he merely mentions that Ram Singh was sent to village Bilga in district Jalandhar for learning the alphabet of *gurmukhi* script. According to Santokh Singh, Ram Singh stayed there for only one month, just learning a few letters.[4] The author of *Namdhari Itihas*

gives a graphic account of his life when he says that

> "By the age of 8 years Guru Ram Singh had memorised several compositions from the Holy *Granth* and had started reciting them in solitude every morning and evening. By 9 he had started actively assisting the parents in the family work. He would go out into the fields in the company of other village lads to graze cattle. There he would, equally with others, participate in the popular rural games like kabaddi, wrestling etc. The other boys would, with gusto, recite popular folk songs. The old men present there would give recitations from the love-tales of Hir Ranjha and Mirza Sahiban. But he (Ram Singh), unlike others, would only recite sacred hymns to the accompaniment of some improvised musical instruments. The playmates would laugh at him, while the old men would be lost in wonder. But gradually some of them joined him in the singing of hymns.[5]

Ram Singh was just five years old when he was betrothed to Bibi Jassan, daughter of a carpenter of village Dharoadna. After two years, marriage ceremony was performed. It may be stated here that in those times child marriage was common. Ram Singh was blessed with two daughters and a son who expired in his infancy.

Disenchanted with formal studies, Ram Singh learnt the traditional calling of his family and began to earn his livelihood.

> After his training, he took up the job of a carpenter at Ludhiana and worked on the building of a church. While on his work, Ram Singh got the opportunity of observing the preachings and customs of the chapels closely. He was very much impressed by the simple teachings of Christianity. Thus he was tempted to find greatness and simplicity in his own faith. This led him to make a detailed analysis of the teachings and traditions of Sikh religion. Ram Singh was fortunate enough to discover soon the greatness of his own faith. He observed that Sikh religion

had been adulterated with many Brahmanical customs and rituals, etc. Therefore he often criticised such practices and talked about reform in Sikhism.[6]

Meanwhile, Ram Singh grew up into a sturdy young man of twenty years. In 1837, Kabul Singh, husband of Ram Singh's sister, came to Bhaini to meet his in-laws. Kabul Singh was a soldier in the artillery section of the Khalsa Fauj of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. He persuaded Ram Singh to join the *Fauj*. Ram Singh was already attached to a regiment named after Prince Nau Nihal Singh, grandson of Ranjit Singh. Ram Singh's stay in the army was fruitful in many ways. He learnt the skills of a soldier and warfare. He was exposed to the socio-religious beliefs and practices of the people of different regions as his regiment moved from one place to another. Moreover, he came to know the customs and rituals practised by the descendants of the gurus, i.e., Bedis, Sodhis, Bhallas, etc. and the Udasis. As noted in the first chapter, the Sodhis of Anandpur and Bedis of Una district and Dera Baba Nanak (tehsil, district Gurdaspur) occupied a special socio-religious status and were revered by thousands of their followers. Important among these traditional leaders were Baba Khem Singh Bedi and Sahib Singh of Una. In Ram Singh's eyes these *sants* and *babas* were devoid of the holy spirit and exploited the common Sikhs in the name of being descendents of Sikh Gurus.

When he was off duty, Ram Singh got plenty of time for *nam-simran* and reading the Sikh scriptures. However, he was not alone in his regiment to show religious inclination. There were several other soldiers who followed Ram Singh's spiritual path. One of them was Kahn Singh who formed a good team with Ram Singh. The other *satsangis* were Jamiat Singh, Dhian Singh, Doola Singh, Jit Singh and Raja Singh. Like Ram Singh, they also meditated in the name of God. As a result of the religious fervour prevalent in his regiment, it later came to be known as *Bhagtan di Regiment* or platoon.[7]

The service in the Khalsa Fauj also enabled Ram Singh to realise the moral depravity which had affected the *Khalsa Darbaris* and *Ahalkars* after the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Santokh Singh Bahowal said that the *Khalsa Darbaris* and *Ahalkars* became notorious and indulged in things like liquor, opium and prostitution. Moreover, the Khalsa also indulged in extortions. Above all, the Khalsa abandoned its moral duty to sustain the Khalsa Raj and protect its subjects from the social discrimination and excesses. The young Ram Singh became so perturbed over the behaviour of the Khalsa that he began to call it *malechh Khalsa*.[8] For his such public utterances and criticism of his officers, Ram Singh was court-martialled and was inflicted heavy punishment.[9] However, because of his deeper understanding of the laws of nature, he would often predict the fall of the Sikh power in the future. When the First Anglo-Sikh war broke out in 1845, he threw his musket into the Sutlej and went home. He did this, not because he was devoid of patriotism or had no desire for victory over the enemy, but because he was convinced that the requisite conditions of success were utterly lacking.[10]

After the defeat of the Khalsa in the battle of Mudki on 18th December 1845, Ram Singh returned to his native village Bhaini. It seems that he made up his mind to give up the military job forever and took to cultivation. However, he had to soon give up cultivation due to the opposition of Lambardar Sheehian Singh and Hamira Singh. Meanwhile, Lambardar Jiwan Singh of village Majra invited Ram Singh to come and stay in his village. Since Ram Singh had no occupation, he devoted his free time to the meditation. After some time, his old friend Lehna Singh persuaded him to return to village Bhaini. He offered a plot for constructing a house. It seems that Ram Singh was still cherishing the idea of being a farmer. With his fellow villagers Sukhu and Khema, he started cultivation in partnership. His wife also showed keen interest in looking

after the household and the livestock.

His interest in cultivation did not sustain for a long time. He came to realise that the villagers did not have an access to their daily needs. He opened a grocery shop with financial aid from his relative who was well off, and made good profit from the sale and purchase of cloth and iron. The village people were impressed by Ram Singh's honest dealing in running the shop. He also earned much respect when he donated some money for running the *langar* for the needy people.[11]

Ram Singh later joined the construction work at Ferozepur run by his maternal uncle, Bhai Hari Singh . After the annexation of the Kingdom of Lahore, the British resolved to develop Ferozepur as military cantonment. The construction work of the Ferozepur Fort was given to Hari Singh. Since Ram Singh was a skilled carpenter and mason, Hari Singh asked him to assist in the construction work. Ram Singh installed *Guru Granth Sahib* in a room and in his free time recited *Asa-di-Var* in the morning and *Rahiras* in the evening. He also meditated in the name of God. After completing the construction work at Ferozepur, Ram Singh also took the assignment of repairing as well as constructing inns and Gurdwaras in Mukatsar. Meanwhile, Khazan Singh, son of contractor Hari Singh, expired. The latter was so shocked that he too died, leaving the family in darkness. Hari Singh's wife was generous to give some money to Ram Singh who invested the same in his village shop.[12]

As early as 1841 when his regiment was asked to move to Peshawar, Ram Singh met Baba Balak Singh at Hazro in district Campbellpur. By this time, Baba Balak Singh had developed a reputation of being a spiritual leader propagating socio-religious reforms. He had gathered a large number of followers who used to perform meditation in the name of God. These followers were popularly called *jagiasis* and *abhiasis* and lived in the neighbourhood of Hazro in the Rawalpindi district. When Baba Balak Singh expired in

1862, his teachings had transformed his followers into a 'sect'. Since the non-Muslim population of Hazro and its neighbouring villages consisted of Aroras and Khatris, it can safely be presumed that the majority of the followers of Baba Balak Singh came from these two occupational castes. Majority of the Arora/Khatri Sikhs were *Sehajdhari* Sikhs. The *jagiasis* and *abhiasis* were, excepting a few, also *Sehajdhari* Sikhs. Baba Balak Singh made it obligatory for his followers to observe the following beliefs and practices:

(i) "One should remember all the twenty four hours the name of God even while sitting, standing or sleeping.
(ii) Bath should be taken at least thrice a day.
(iii) No use of leather bucket for drinking water.
(iv) Marriages to be performed according to *Anand* rites and no expensive shows to be made.
(v) Every month *Prasad* of one rupee and four annas to be made in the name of God.
(vi) Not to eat food cooked by anybody other than his co-religionists.
(vii) No dowry to be given in the marriages.
(viii) No selling of the girls.
(ix) Meat, tobacco and wine etc., prohibited.
(x) To earn one's livelihood by his own efforts and hard work.
(xi) Not to tell lies and not to indulge in indecent things.
(xii) To keep one small sword in the turban.
(xiii) To love one's co-religionists and to help them in every way."[13]

These teachings too indicate that Baba Balak Singh's followers were *Sehajdhari* Sikhs since they were not administered *Khande-di-Pahul* and asked to keep five *kakars (kachh, kara, kirpan, kanga* and *kes)*. Similarly, there is no reference to performing *havan* while consummating marriage rituals. Moreover, there is omission of rituals pertaining to birth and death. In fact, Baba Balak Singh's

emphasis was on *nam-simran*, ethical values and discarding of social evils. He also emphasised on maintaining social exclusiveness and cohesion among his followers. Moreover, since his *jagiasis* and *abhiasis* (including Khatris and Aroras) were in microscopic minority in the Muslim dominated area, Baba Balak Singh did not reiterate those features of *Rahitnamas*, Sau-Sakhis and *Prem Sumarag*, which were hostile to Muslims. But his successor, Ram Singh, forcefully advocated a prototype of *Rahitnamas*, Sau-Sakhis and *Prem Sumarag* which were in vogue in the first half of the 19th century.[14]

Baba Balak Singh had three favourite disciples: Kahn Singh, Lal Singh and Ram Singh. Kahn Singh became head of the sect at Hazro. Lal Singh settled at Amritsar and Ram Singh came to his native village Bhaini Alha. Both police reports and Namdhari literature confirm that Baba Ram Singh was duly elected as Baba Balak Singh's successor. In 1863, District Superintendent of Police, Attock, reported that though the sect seems to have failed in the neighbourhood of Hazro since Balak Singh's death, it has thriven in the most remarkable manner in the district adjoining the home of his more energetic successor.[15]

Notes and References

* *Sep:* generally the grain given for the service rendered by the village artisans and menials; *Sepidars:* one who renders the service called *sep* and receives the customary remuneration.

1. This sketchy information has been given in the *Bansawli Sri Satguru Ram Singh Ji*, written by Suba Surinder Kaur Kharal. The author does not cite the sources of her information. Most probably, she has collected this information from the Namdhari literature of the 19th century as well as from oral Namdhari tradition. In his work, *Panth Prakash*, Giani Gyan Singh, a contemporary of Namdhari guru, mentions the name of the Namdhari Guru's parents, occupation and place of birth (Bhaini).
2. Prithipal Singh Kapur, "Baba Ram Singh Namdhari", *Missionary*, Vol.3 No. 11. New Delhi, June 1962, pp 57-62.
3. Jaswant Singh Jass, *Baba Ram Singh Namdhari*, Kasturi Lal and Sons, Amritsar, 1962, p 2.

4. Sant Santokh Singh Bahowal. *Satguru Bilas*, (Ed. Jaswinder Singh) Part-I, Namdhari Darbar, Sri Bhaini Sahib, Ludhiana, 2002, p 103.
5. Cited by Fauja Singh. *Kuka Movement*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1965, p 5.
6. Prithipal Singh Kapur, p 58; also see Milieu.
7. Kahn Singh belonged to village Chak Kalan, Malerkotla. He was Jat by caste. Both Ram Singh and Kahn Singh became the followers of Baba Balak Singh. Both of them left the army and went back to their respective native villages. However, when Namdhari Guru Ram Singh formed the Sant Khalsa, Kahn Singh was one of the five Sikhs who were administered *Khande-di-Pahul* by the Namdhari Guru. In the subsequent years, Kahn Singh became one of the close confidants of the Namdhari Guru. The latter appointed Kahn Singh as one of the twenty two Subas and also assigned the duty of propagation of Namdhari mission in the states of Nabha, Patiala and some areas of Rajpura, Jagadhari, Jakhal and Bangar. The Namdhari Guru also deputed him as his agent to the ruler of Nepal. Moreover, Kahn Singh was one of those Subas who were arrested alongwith Namdhari Guru Ram Singh and deported to Burma: *Baba Ram Singh* (Jaswant Singh Jass), p 5.
8. Santokh Singh Bahowal, p 104; Jaswant Singh Jass, pp 5-6.
9. Prithipal Singh Kapur, p 58.
10. Fauja Singh, p 7.
11. This shop continued till 1872 when Namdhari Guru was deported to Burma. Its incharge was Waryam Singh. His brother Budh Singh (subsequently known as Namdhari Guru Hari Singh), alongwith family occupation, took to the work of transporting goods with the help of bullock cart.
12. Jaswant Singh Jass, pp 8-9.
13. Surjit Kaur Jolly, *Sikh Revivalist Movements*, Gitanjali Publishing House, New Delhi, 1988, pp 39-40.
14. W.H. McLeod, pp 136-152.
15. Cited in *Rebels Against the British Rule*, (Eds. Bhai Nahar Singh and Bhai Kirpal Singh), Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, 1995, p 1.

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3

NAMDHARI MISSION: STRATEGY AND ORGANISATION

Understanding the mission of Namdhari Guru Ram Singh has been problematic in the modern Sikh history of Punjab. As mentioned earlier, there are two broad perspectives in which Kuka Movement has been perceived and analysed. The popular perspective is that the Kuka Movement was essentially a socio-religious reform movement and its confrontation with the British Raj was accidental. The protagonists of this perspective are historians like Dr Ganda Singh and several writers like Shamsher Singh Ashok and Piara Singh Padam. However, the second perspective stresses that the ultimate political objective of this movement was to liberate the Punjabis from the British rule. The advocates of this perspective are M.M. Ahluwalia and Fauja Singh. The protagonists of the first perspective enlist a variety of social evils to whom Namdhari Guru Ram Singh addressed and aimed at reviving that social order which was to be free from socio-religious exploitation and discrimination. In this regard, references are made to those irrational beliefs and practices which were advocated by the priestly classes, like *Brahmans, Mahants* and *Pujaris* on one hand and *sants* and *babas* on the other. In addition to this, some scholars also refer to the socio-religious and cultural threat posed by the colonial rule and its cultural institutions, particularly the Christian Missionaries. They cite the effects of propaganda of the Christian Church and educational

institutions on the Punjabis. They also quote the British policy which deliberately targeted Sikhs and Sikhism after the annexation of the Khalsa Raj. The most popular instance quoted by these scholars is the total disregard shown by the British officials to the Sikh religious sentiments. It is stated that these officials did not show due respect to the Sikh scriptures, like *Guru Granth Sahib* and Sikh places of worship, like the Harmandir Sahib, Amritsar. They also quote the conversion of Maharaja Dalip Singh to Christianity and the opening of cow-slaughter houses, especially near Harmandir Sahib, Amritsar. On the other hand, the protagonists of the second perspective highlight the revival of Khalsa traditions and interpret the teachings of Namdhari Guru Ram Singh to argue that these teachings stemmed the moral degradation and aimed to inculcate the spirit of 'patriotism' and 'nationalism' among the Sikhs so that they could liberate the people from the British rule.

However, it is argued here that there was a transformation in the mission of Namdhari Guru Ram Singh in accordance with the contemporary milieu. Three broad phases of this mission are perceptible. The first phase started when he came under the influence of a spiritual preceptor, Baba Balak Singh (1785-1862) and became the protagonist of Sikh tradition of *nam-simran*. He continued with the programme of socio-religious reforms of his spiritual preceptor. In the second phase, he made a departure from *Sehajdhari* to Khalsa tradition when he founded the Sant Khalsa in 1857. In the third and last phase he cherished the restoration of the Khalsa Raj and the end of the British Raj. He himself hints towards this transformation in his socio-religious mission when he states that first he became a follower of a Udasi Sant, then of a Nirmala *Sant* but his spiritual quest remained unfulfilled and ultimately he took *Khande-di-Pahul*. It is the meditation in the name of God alone which satisfied his spiritual quest.[1] Although, he does not mention the names of those Udasi and Nirmala *sants* and

their *deras* yet it is clear that before being influenced by Baba Balak Singh, he might have interacted with these *sants*. In the *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, it is mentioned that

> Baba Balak Singh was born in 1841 Bk/AD 1785 to Dial Singh and Mata Bhag Bhari, in an Arora family of village Chhoi in Attock district, in Rawalpindi (now in Pakistan) division. From the young age Balak Singh took to the family business of supplying garrison in the fort at Hazro, close to his native village. He was married to Mai Toti. No more biographical information is available about him except that he was a man of religious disposition and while at Hazro he was deeply influenced by Bhagat Jawahar Mall. He soon attracted followers from among the inhabitants of Hazro and from among the garrison in the fort.[2]

Baba Balak Singh imbibed religious and ethical code of conduct of Bhagat Jawahar Mall. His code included "constant meditation on the Transcendental Reality; bathing at least thrice daily; not to use a leather bucket for drinking water; performing marriage rites according to the *Anand* ceremony; offering as sacrament *karah prasad* worth one and a quarter rupee every month; and not to eat food cooked by anyone outside of the Sikh faith. Giving of dowry, meat-eating and use of alcohol were totally prohibited. Honest labour and truth-telling were the virtues prized most."[3]

In his work *Panth Prakash* (1846), Giani Gian Singh highlights the importance of Namdhari Guru Ram Singh's interaction with his spiritual preceptor Baba Balak Singh.[4] The spiritual interaction between him and his follower Ram Singh went a long way toward the latter's resolve to correct the distortions which had entered into Sikhism. Moreover, this interaction also built up his rapport with his colleagues. According to Bhai Santokh Singh Bahowal, there were 150 Sikh soldiers who were administered *Nam* by Baba Balak Singh. Important among these were Baba Jamiat Singh Gill,

Kahn Singh Nihal Chak, Jit Singh Tharu and Raja Trandi, Sham Singh Sarhali and Bhagwan Singh Adbangi. These soldiers, as we shall note, played an important role in the formation of a new *panth*.

II

The Namdhari Guru's return to his native village was an important development in his socio-religious career. The socio-cultural and demographic context of the Malwa region was radically different from the geo-political context of Hazro in which his spiritual master propagated his mission. In his native village, he not only meditated in the name of God but came to know the nature of beliefs and practices being practised by the people of the Malwa region. These people belonged to different occupational castes and religions. As mentioned in the beginning, it was the predecessors of the Bagarian family who propagated Sikh faith in this region. It was Bhai Rup Chand (1614-1709) who became a follower of Guru Hargobind and established a Gurdwara in honour of Guru Hargobind at *Bhai ki Samadh* or Samadh Bhai village to commemorate the *Guru's* visit. It is said that "his sons received the rites of the Khalsa at the hands of Guru Gobind Singh at Damdama Sahib (Talvandi Sabo) and accompanied the Guru during his journey to the South. After some time, the Guru advised them to return to Punjab and preach the Guru's word."[5] Consequently, Sikhs of this region began to revere the Sikh Gurus and their scriptures. Some of them also took pahul. Equally important was the influence of the Muhammadan saint, Sakhi Sarvar Sultan, whose tomb was at Nigaha, in Dera Ghazi Khan district. The Hindu Jat population became the followers of *Sakhi Sarvar* and were known as *Sultanis*. The Hindu Jats may be credited for having brought the influence of *Sakhi Sarvar* to the Malwa region. They established *pirkhanas* in

the rural area. The attendants of these *pirkhanas* were known as *bharais*. It were the Sultanis who began to take *pahul* and added the word 'Singh' to their names. However, they could not liberate themselves from the worship of *pirkhanas* on the one hand and of Hindu Gods and Goddesses on the other. Ibbetson gives a graphic picture of a Sultani Sikh.

> A Sultani will generally call himself a Sikh, and does not seem to recognise much difference between himself and the Guru Sikh, except that the latter cannot enjoy his pipe. Sultan is attended to once in the year; and even this is a mere matter of custom.... The real religion of both Sikh and Sultani is a belief in one God and in everyday life there is blind obedience to the Brahmin.[6]

Since the entire countryside of Punjab was dotted with *pirkhanas* and *khanaqahs* and thousands of Sikhs were followers of *Sakhi Sarvar*[7], therefore, Namdhari Guru expressed his concern over this problem. He perceived that the worship of tombs and shrines, *thakardavars* and *shivdavars* was a perversion of Sikhism. The teachings of Namdhari Guru Ram Singh, as we shall note, were directed against the pervasive influence of *pirs*, especially *Sakhi Sarvar* and against tombs and shrines.

Beside, the popular worship of *Sakhi Sarvar*, the people including the Sikhs, as mentioned earlier, worshipped another *pir* called *Gugga*[8] and goddesses like Durga, Kali, Kalka, Maheshwari, Sitala Devi, Mansa Devi and Naina Devi. Thousands of Sikhs and Hindus worshipped these deities in Kangra, Hoshiarpur and Ambala districts. "Sikhs were not simply devotees of the *Devi* but occasionally participated in the Orders associated with the goddess. For instance, there were Sikh *faqirs* among the Telraja Order associated with the *Jwalamukhi* Devi in Kangra."[9] For the Namdhari Guru, these *devidavaras, shivdavaras* and *mandirs* were means of extortion and to be held in contempt and never to be visited.

As also mentioned in the earlier chapters, the Sikhs living in the rural areas worshipped Suraj Devta, rivers and streams (Khwaja Khizer—god of water) and trees such as *pipal* (Ficus religiosa) and *bar* (Bengalensis). For instance, the Jat clans of Malwa region worshipped the *Jand* tree (Prosopis spicigera). Similarly, the women worshipped *Tulsi* (Basil). They also believed in evil spirits *(bhoots, churels* and *dam),* sorcery and magical healing, etc.

Above all, the Sikh shrines in each district of Punjab had become centres of popular culture. These shrines were in the custody of *Mahants* and *Pujaris* who were Nirmalas and Udasis. Along with the Gurdwara, where the *Granth Sahib* was installed, these shrines also contained *smadhs* and tombs which were constructed in the name of Sikh martyrs. In the precincts of these shrines, worshipping of Hindu gods and goddesses was also practiced. Moreover, fairs were held on the occasions of Maghi, Diwali and Baisakhi etc. In this context, we can cite the example of the temple at Daroli village in Tehsil Moga. This was called Mata Damodari *Mandir,* and two annual fairs were held at this place, one on Lohri and other on Baisakhi. Mata Damodari was a goddess and disciple of Guru Har Gobind and her tomb was near the *mandir.* This temple was built in S. 1710. No Brahmin was employed as a *pujari.* This service was performed by a Sikh who kept the *mandir* clean, washed the *chabutra* or platform in the morning and lit a sacred lamp in the evening. A drum was also beaten. Similarly, a temple at Sirai Mangha in Tehsil Mukatsar was known as *Guru Nanak ji ka Gurdwara* and a fair was held there on *Baisakhi.* The temple contained a stone with Guru Nanak's footprint on it. It was managed by the descendents of *Bhais* who employed the services of an Udasi. On the occasion of a fair, *Granth Sahib* was recited and *karah prasad* was distributed. A lamp was always kept burning. Both Hindus and Sikhs paid their homages. Thus, there was no distinction between Hindu and Sikh beliefs and practices.[10]

In the initial stage, Namdhari Guru Ram Singh was worried about the irreligiousness among the Sikhs and their belief in polytheism. He was also concerned about the non-existence of *nam-simran*, recitation of *gurbani* particularly from the *Adi-Granth*. Sant Nidhan Singh Alam rightly understood the state of Sikhism when he said,

> "those Sikhs whose ancestors used to get up early in the morning, washed themselves properly and read the *Guru Granth* before even taking a grain of food, were now so fallen that their life seemed to be entirely changed. Now they did not read *Japji* and their whole attitude was one of contempt and ridicule towards religion."[11]

Forming Sant Khalsa

In the wake of moral and religious degradation among the Sikhs, Namdhari Guru Ram Singh thought of reviving Khalsa traditions which had been supplanted by the then holy men, descendents of Sikh gurus (Bedis and Sodhis) and *Mahants* and *Pujaris*. As noted earlier, Ram Singh was known in the neighbouring villages as a simple, honest, and God fearing man. By this time, he had formed a nucleus of former colleagues in the Khalsa army and a big number of his followers. Incidentally, we don't have any contemporary source which mentions the causes and circumstances under which Sant Khalsa was founded on 12 April 1857. It is only the account of Santokh Singh Bahowal which mentions its date and place of formation. He also states that Namdhari Guru Ram Singh got inspiration and guidance from his spiritual master Baba Balak Singh. But at the same time it may also be pointed out here that formation of Sant Khalsa and its *rahit* was not complementary to the teachings of Baba Balak Singh. As stated earlier, the focus of Baba Balak Singh's teachings was on the *Sehajdhari* traditions.[12] Baba Balak Singh also started an initiation ceremony and administered *gurmantar* in the ears of the person to be admitted into the fold. Namdhari Guru Ram Singh also started the practice of

administering *Khande-di-Pahul* to his followers as was being done by other *sants* and *babas*. He asked his followers to keep five *kakars* as per popular tradition. However, when the British Government imposed restrictions on carrying *kirpan*, he advised his followers to keep a heavy *lathi* in place of *kirpan*. It may also be mentioned here that the ritual of baptism was performed by the *Mahants* and *Pujaris* who were the custodians of the *takhats* and Gurdwaras. By administering *Khande-di-Pahul* to the following persons, Namdhari Guru added sanctity to his headquarters at Bhaini Sahib:

1. Bhai Kahn Singh Nihang, Village Chak, Malerkotla state.
2. Bhai Labh Singh, Amritsar.
3. Bhai Naina Singh Wariah, Amritsar district.
4. Bhai Atma Singh, Village Ala Muhar, district Sialkot (now in Pakistan).
5. Bhai Sudh Singh, Village Durgapur, district Jalandhar.

The Namdhari Guru can also be given a credit for admitting women in his Order after administering them *Khande-di-Pahul*. This fact is corroborated both by Santokh Singh Bahowal and official reports. It may also be pointed out here that administering *amrit* to women was an exceptional ritual in the mid 19th century in Punjab. However, in case of Namdhari Sikhs both men and women were administered baptism of *Khande-di-Pahul* . The contemporary official reports state that there was a substantial number of *Sehajdhari* Sikhs who were the followers of Namdhari Guru Ram Singh.[13]

The British officials took note of the Sant Khalsa and its code of conduct and some beliefs and practices in 1863. Talking about these beliefs and practices, M M Ahluwalia quotes that

> he abolishes all distinctions of caste among Sikhs; advocates indiscriminate marriages of all classes; enjoins the marriage of widows, all which he performs himself;

> he never takes alms himself and prohibits his followers from doing so; enjoins abstinence from liquor and drugs.... He exhorts his disciples to be cleanly and truth-telling and it is well that every man carries his staff; and they all do; the Granth is their only accepted inspired volume. The brotherhood may be known by the tie (sic) of their turban—Sheeda Pug, by a watch-word, by a necklace of knots made in a white woollen cord, to repeat beads and which are worn by all the community (sic).[14]

Giani Gian Singh's work *Panth Prakash* corroborates the above mentioned *Rahit* of the Sant Khalsa. For him Namdhari Guru Ram Singh ushered a new era called *Satjug*.[15] Another close contemporary Namdhari scholar Sant Dhian Singh also confirms that *maryada* introduced by Namdhari Guru Ram Singh was that *maryada* which was prescribed by Guru Gobind Singh himself. It is said that Namdhari Guru Ram Singh deputed his close confidant Bhai Rai Singh for recording the *maryada* of the Khalsa which was in vogue at Hazur Sahib, Nanded. Namdhari Guru Ram Singh also gave some instructions to Bhai Rai Singh, which included not accepting any offering for his personal use and also observe celibacy. Bhai Rai Singh stayed there for more than three months. It is further said that when Namdhari Guru Ram Singh received this *maryada*, he and his family too took the *pahul* from Baba Jawahar Singh. Nevertheless, according to this *maryada* it became obligatory for the Namdhari Sikhs to keep five *kakkars*— *kes, kanga, kachh, kara* and *kirpan*. Since *kirpan* had been disallowed by the Government, as mentioned earlier, a heavy *lathi* was ordered to be kept in its place. Santokh Singh Bahowal makes an interesting comment when he says that the Sikhs, particularly women, did not wear *kachh* in those times but Namdhari Guru Ram Singh forced them to do that. According to this *maryada*, the Sant Khalsa was to observe a strict code of discipline. Accordingly, they were required to

lead pure and clean lives attuned to the name of God; develop regular and disciplined habits. For instance, they were to rise at 3.00 a.m., brush their teeth, bathe and recite the name of God, especially the *Chandi di Var*— a Guru Gobind Singh's composition.[16] Recitation of *Chandi di Var* was intended to inculcate the martial spirit among the members of the Sant Khalsa so that they could fight against tyranny. For inculcating the martial spirit among the Namdharis, the Namdhari Guru laid down a specific mode for reciting *Chandi-Path* in an assembly which lasted for two to three days.[17]

Namdhari Guru Ram Singh also made an arrangement for the training of young Sant Khalsa in the use of *gadka*, horse-riding and weapons. Already distinct in physical appearance, he wished that the Sant Khalsa should feel as if they were 'the eclectic', while others were *malechh*, unclean. For that matter, he taught them the virtues of purity and truth. On the occasion of initiation, Namdhari Guru pre-laid a condition for a person to be admitted as Namdhari by stressing that only that person should come for initiation who was prepared to, 'First consent to death; give up the desire to live; become the dust of the earth; and then come to me'. The Namdhari Guru ensured that 'on initiation all vices are supposed to be foresworn, such as lying, stealing, drinking, adultery etc'. However, 'there was also the provision of a Panchayat where the offenders could be punished or brought back to the path of religious purity'.[18]

Gurmat Parchar: Institutional Arrangements

After the formation of the Sant Khalsa, Namdhari Guru Ram Singh undertook the task of *gurmat* propagation. He revived the Sikh tradition of *kirtan*, singing in praise of God, or devotional singing.[19] It was during the lifetime of the Sikh Gurus, from Guru Nanak Dev to Guru Arjan Dev, that devotional singing in a congregation came into being.[20]

Namdhari Guru wished that through the devotional

singing his followers should have personal experience of heavenly joy and spiritual ecstasy. Some of his followers while reciting the name of God lost control over their senses and emitted shrieks, their turbans fell off. It was from this state of religious and ecstatic frenzy that they came to be known as Kukas—shriekers. These Kukas recited *shabad* on top of their voices accompanied by *dholaks* and *chhehane*.[21]

Ragis, Dhadis and Parcharaks

Namdhari Guru Ram Singh employed professional singers, the *ragis*. Moreover, he formed *ragi-jathas* (group of devotional singers) and *dhadi-jathas* (group of bards). The *dhadis* were those who sung *vars* or ballads with a musical instrument called *dhad*, a drumlet, and *sarangi*, a stringed instrument. Since the days of Guru Hargobind (1595-1644), the *dhadis* flourished in the art of reciting heroic ballads at the Sikh assemblies.[22] Similarly, the *ragis* sung hymns of the *Adi-Granth* to the accompaniment of stringed musical instruments.

Namdhari Guru Ram Singh deployed these *ragi-jathas* and *dhadi-jathas* in the different areas: The *ragi jatha* of Bhai Ditu and Bhai Fakira was deployed in district Sialkot, *ragi-jatha* of Bhai Tara singh and Bhai Pali (of Attari, Amritsar) in Majha area and *ragi-jatha* of Bhai Suba Singh in Doaba area. The *dhadi-jatha* comprised of Bhai Pishaura Singh and Bhai Sant Singh, who belonged to Talwandi Maliyan, sang the songs of bravery of the Sikh heroes wherever the Sikh assemblies were held in Punjab. To keep these *ragis* and *dhadis* under discipline, the Namdhari guru instructed his *sangat* to observe austerity in extending hospitality to them. The singing *jathas* were given food and One Rupee for other expenses.[23] He revived the tradition of reading and reciting *gurbani* and performing *bhog* of the *Adi-Granth*. For instance, in most of the existing Dharamsalas, the *Mahants* and *Pujaris*, *bhais* and *granthis* neither recited *gurbani* in the morning or evening nor performed *bhog* of *Adi-Granth*. He was pained

to know that the sacred Sikh scriptures were kept in the almirahs. He got the copies of *Adi-Granth* printed and made this scripture available to his followers.

Founding Dharamsalas

The Namdhari Guru resolved to establish Dharamsalas. Till the late nineteenth century, the Sikh temples were known as Dharamsalas. The founding of Dharamsalas by the Namdhari Sikhs implied that the local Sikhs, either on their own or at the direction of the local officials and Sikh gentry, did not allow Namdhari Sikhs to enter into the Dharamsalas. As noted earlier, the priestly class and the Sikh gentry opposed the Namdhari Sikhs for political as well as religious reasons. Moreover, the *lambardars*, *panchayats* and the *zaildars* insulted and humiliated the Namdhari Sikhs in their own villages. The Namdhari Sikhs were not allowed to hold their congregations and recite *bani* publicly. Those who dared to perform *akhand-paths* were awarded *jurmanas* (fines) and put into jail for 6 months to 7 years.[24] When and wherever such hostility ceased, the Namdhari Sikhs thought of founding their own Dharamsalas. It is claimed by the Namdhari scholars that the Namdhari Guru Ram Singh himself got repaired several old and dilapidated Dharamsalas and founded some new ones. He also recovered old copies of *birs* (*Adi-Granths*) and installed them in the Dharamsalas. He got printed copies of the *Adi-Granth* from Buta Singh's Press at Lahore. These copies were printed in *gurmukhi* letters first on a lithograph and then on a printing machine.[25]

Undertaking Tours

Since the founding of the Sant Khalsa, Namdhari Guru Ram Singh undertook extensive tours of villages and towns located in different regions of Punjab. His purpose for undertaking these tours was multiple: reaching straight to the people, understanding their problems and aspirations, and disseminating the programme of social reforms. In these

tours, he was accompanied by his troupe comprising 100 to 500 followers. Among these followers were *ragis, granthis* and *parcharaks*. Wherever he went, the local Namdhari *sangat* made arrangements for holding religious congregations called *diwans* and *hollas*. He himself held religious discourses and the *ragis* and *granthis* recited *gurbani* and performed *kirtan*.

Since he wanted to address a larger audience, he chose special occasions like festivals and fairs which were usually held at some historical religious places. Although it is difficult to note down the itinerary of all his movements yet some of his visits to the religious places are noted. In April 1861, Namdhari Guru went to Haridwar when the fair of *ardh-kumbhi* was going on. Before reaching this place of pilgrimage, the Namdhari Guru stayed at different villages and towns and displayed his supernatural powers. He exposed the hypocrisy of the Udasi and Nirmala *sants* and gave food and clothes to the needy people. Namdhari literature is full of references to miracles and the display of supernatural powers by him. Only a few instances of this type of demonstration are cited here. At village Khanna, he performed *havan;* disciplined his delinquent followers and prophesied the end of *Firangi* Raj and stoppage of cow slaughter. At Ambala, he told his followers that horse trade would not take place as it did in the earlier years. It is said that he liberated several people from the evil spirits in Kurukshetra. Reaching Haridwar, he held a number of encounters with the Nirmala *sants* who had forgotten to show due respect to the *Adi-Granth* and propagation of Sikhism. It is also recorded that Namdhari Guru was accompanied by women including those from his family. He taught these women to give up hypocrisy or cunningness and live according to the will of the Almighty. Similarly, he showed the righteous path to the *sadhus*.[26]

In 1862, the Namdhari Guru took pilgrimage to Amritsar—the holy city of the Sikhs, on the occasion of

Diwali as Harmandir Sahib had been known as a site for the celebration of this day. Thousands of people, irrespective of religious and caste affiliations paid their homage at Harmandir Sahib. On his route through Doaba, the Namdhari Guru reached Amritsar and administered *gurmantar* and *amrit* to several men and women. Hundreds of his followers listened to the discourse of their spiritual master. However, such assemblies of Namdhari Sikhs created apprehensions among the *Mahants* and *Pujaris* of Darbar Sahib as they thought that the propagation of *nam-simran*, devoid of any ritual, shall erode their credibility and consequently reduce offerings at their doors. However, no serious encounter took place between the Namdhari Guru and the *Pujaris* of *Akal Bunga*. It may also be pointed out here that this visit of the Namdhari Guru was not noticed by the police.

According to Nidhan Singh Alam, Satguru Ram Singh moved from Amritsar to Nankana Sahib, the birth place of Guru Nanak Dev. No details of Namdhari Guru's interactions with the *sangat* find mention. It is simply said that Satguru addressed the *sangat*. From Nankana Sahib he moved towards Wazirabad and from there he came to know of the demise of Baba Balak Singh from the *sangat* of Hazro who had brought the remains of Baba Balak Singh for pouring them into the Ganga river. According to Bahowal's account, Baba's remains were brought to Amritsar in a procession to pay homage at Harmandir Sahib.[27]

Pilgrimage to Mukatsar

In 1862, Namdhari Guru made a programme to pay homage to the holy place of Mukatsar, commemorating the martyrdom of 40 *muktas* i.e. the Liberated Ones. Mukatsar got its name from a sacred pool known as Khidrana Dhab. Subsequently, five Gurdwaras were constructed to commemorate the events of 29 December 1805. "The sites were marked out by an eighteenth century Nirmala *sant*,

Bhai Langar Singh, resident of Harike Kalan, 18 km east of Mukatsar."[28] Gurdwara Tibbi Sahib was first established as a moderate structure during the eighteenth century and reconstructed in 1845 by Sodhi Mann Singh of Mansinghwala. In mid 19th century, a major annual celebration was held on the *Maghi* day (mid-January). A large number of devotees thronged at this holy place for ablutions in the holy pool. Religious congregations were also arranged, most probably by the *Mahants* and *Pujaris* who were custodians of these shrines.

In the routine way, the Namdhari Guru's *Jatha* moved from one place to another after holding *diwans* and ultimately reached Faridkot. The *Raja* of Faridkot, according to Namdhari tradition, inducted a spy in the *Jatha* for gathering information about the activities of the Namdhari Guru and his followers. Unfortunately, this spy started stealing money from the followers and he was caught and thrashed. On reaching the holy place, the Namdhari guru and his followers occupied some rooms for their stay and for cooking *langar*. Meanwhile, in the precincts of Mukatsar Gurdwara, groups of youngsters indulged in unethical acts and sung obscene folk songs. When Namdhari followers told the youngsters to stop these actions and maintain sanctity of the holy place, a scuffle took place between them. The worst thing was that the *Mahants* and *Pujaris* refused to perform *ardas* on behalf of the Namdhari Guru because they wanted the latter to regret acts of omissions and commissions (*bhullan*) and accept *tankhah*. The *Pujaris* further said that they were willing to condone his *tankhah* if the Namdhari Guru could contribute to the construction of a *pacca sarovar* (cemented holy-pool). According to Giani Gian Singh, *Pujaris* objected to the Namdhari followers' practice of throwing off their turbans in a state of religious frenzy. The Namdhari Guru expressed his inability to accept *tankhah* and himself performed *ardas*.[29]

A confrontation took place between Namdhari

followers and the police which had come over to Mukatsar for maintaining law and order. Since the number of Namdhari followers was very substantial, the British officials did not take any action against them as they possessed *lathis*. However, the British officials became apprehensive of the activities of the Namdhari Guru and his followers.

Between 1860 to 1863, the Namdhari Guru converted some followers, who subsequently held important positions in the administrative hierarchy of the Namdhari community, into the Namdhari sect. One such follower was Jagirdar Mangal Singh of village Bishanpura. Sardar Mangal Singh was a close relative of Maharaja Narindra Singh of Patiala state (Maharaja's sister was married to Mangal Singh.) This Sardar offered a white mare (popularly known as *chini-ghori*). The importance of Mangal Singh's conversion lies in the fact that landed aristocracy began to respond to the Namdhari mission. As noted earlier, the Namdhari Guru held encounters with Nirmala and Udasi *sants* and they were shown the real path of *gurmat*. Baba Jawahar Singh was one such Nirmala *sant*. He rose to the position of *suba* and was arrested by the British government on account of "his position with Ram Singh and his personal reputation for sanctity."[30] Suba Sahib Singh was another convert from a group of *Sadhus* who was impressed by the Namdhari Guru's discourses. Sahib Singh belonged to village Bhanghalipur in Amritsar district. He played an important role in spreading the Namdhari mission in Majha area. He was the incharge of the dak-systen. Later on, he was assigned a mission to Nepal for building a rapport with this native state. It was the Nirmalas and Udasis who became Singhs and assumed their traditional role of propagation of Sikhism.

There was a large number of Sikhs who were addicted to opium, liquor and tobacco. *Hukka* was a popular device for smoking tobacco in the three regions: Malwa, Doaba and Majha. Relatively, Malwai Sikhs were given more to *hukka* and *post* (poppy). The Namdhari literature tells the story of

an addict who was cured by Namdhari Guru Ram Singh. He was administered *amrit* and renamed Dhaunkar Singh and was later known to have emerged as a brave Namdhari Sikh. Along with the Namdhari Guru, he was deported to Rangoon in 1872, but subsequently his whereabouts were unknown.[31] There are several anecdotes narrated in the Namdhari literature which show an aggressive stance of the Namdhari Guru towards tobacco smokers. One such anecdote is about the Brahmins and some people of village Muthadda in district Jalandhar who offered *prasad* cooked in *hukka*-water. The Namdhari Guru and his followers thrashed these mischiefs and taught them a lesson. On several occasions, the Namdhari Guru broke *hukkas* with his *slottar* (*lathi*). At the same time, he persuaded a large number of people to give up intoxicants and become *Gursikh*. Giani Gian Singh stated that the Namdhari Guru ushered a new era called *Satjug*.[32]

1863 was a momentous year in Namdhari Guru's life. It was in this year that he not only exposed social evils and evil-doers but also came out with the solution to the social problems confronted by the common Sikhs. The Sikhs, like their counterparts Hindus and Muslims, were caught in a web of social evils. The most inhuman but widely practiced evils were female infanticide, child marriage, dowry system, *vatta-satta*, and brahmanical orthodoxy exploiting the common people. Prostitution and homosexuality had also become a serious threat to the moral fabric of the society. Moreover, the agriculturists were going under debt on a massive scale. It is a paradox that if colonial legislation and its structure facilitated the task of social reformers, the same rule accentuated social evils like prostitution and extravagance.

Since woman was the major victim of these evils, the Namdhari Guru resolved to liberate her from the vicious

circle of these evils. His resolve took a practical shape when he administered *amrit* to women on the same pattern as it was administered to the men. For centuries together baptism of *Khande-di-Pahul* had become a domain of the male members of the Khalsa *panth*. The Namdhari Guru broke this male dominated tradition and admitted women to the Sant Khalsa. According to Namdhari accounts, it was in the village *Siahar* that the women of Namdhari Sikhs were administered *amrit* in a *diwan* which was organised in the *haveli* of Baba Bela Singh on 1 June 1863. It is said that there were around 25 women who were administered *amrit*. Like the Namdhari male Sikhs, these women also kept five *kakars* and wore white dresses.[33]

However, a more radical step taken by the Namdhari Guru was an introduction of *Anand-reeti*. The procedure of this *reeti* was as follows: it began with the recitation of *Asa-di-Var*, the *Adi-Granth* was placed at some distance. *Vedi* was constructed and *havan* was performed. Five Singhs recited *gurbani* from the *pothis;* two Singhs were deployed for performing *ahuti; amrit* was prepared and administered to the boy and girl and then *lavan* were recited from *Granth Sahib* while the couple took four rounds of the *havan*. In the end, *Anand Sahib* and *ardas* were performed and *karah prasad* was distributed. It was a historic day when the ancient Vedic mode of marriage was discarded and some marriages were performed according to the *Anand-reeti* at the village Khotte in June 1863. No dowry, not even a feast, was allowed on this occasion. According to Namdhari literature, a marriage of six couples was performed. Another significant feature of these marriages was that boys and girls were belonged to different castes. For examples, the daughter of a carpenter was married in the family of Arora caste.[34] These marriages without any pomp and show, particularly without dowry, was a new thing for the local people. It is said that the villagers gathered around a place where *Anand* marriages were performed. Nevertheless, the Namdhari Guru and his

followers had to face the opposition of the Brahmins and artisans and match-makers who lost the source of their income. The Brahmins of village Khotte were so perturbed that they threatened to immolate themselves. When the Namdhari Guru refused to yield to their pressure, they got a false report registered at the police station, Bagha Purana, alleging that five hundred Namdhari followers had gathered in the village Khotte and were making anti-British propaganda. Consequently, the Deputy Commissioner of Ferozepur reached the village Khotte and investigated the matter. The Namdharis were compelled to break up their assembly and were sent back to their respective villages.[35]

The relevance of the programme of reform in the mode of marriage can only be appreciated in the context of several rituals, customs and practices which forced women to lead a miserable life in the mid 19th century in Punjab. The practices of selling and exchanging women had become an accepted ethos of Punjabi rural society. Both these practices showed a deep-rooted socio-economic malady in which the people were caught up. Marrying, for men, was a costly affair and beyond the reach of poor peasants who constituted a major segment of the agrarian society. The price of a bride varied from Rs 50 to Rs 500-600 in the late 19th century. This price index multiplied to Rs 2000 to Rs 4000 in the early 20th century.[36]

Rising cost of marriage due to shortage of girls and fear of fragmentation of landholding were some of the factors which, as reported in District Gazetteers, led to a practice among the Jat and Rajput families to keep one or two men single. It also led to an unethical practice of sharing a wife by two or three brothers. Moreover, shortage of girls and costly marriages also encouraged the practice of exchanging daughters or nieces for a bride. Such unethical practices were bound to continue as women were required to rear sons and perform domestic chores and work in agriculture fields.[37] Besides, the birth of a girl was considered an ill-omen. This

practice was prevalent even among the Sikhs of high-castes: Khatris, Aroras, Bedis and Sodhis. The girl-infants, if survived, were neither groomed nor properly educated. They were often subjected to mental and physical tortures and married off before they reached the age of puberty.

Addressing to the magnitude of this problem, the Namdhari Guru exhorted his followers to stop committing infanticide and selling daughters in marriage. For him these practices were bigger crimes and sins than the killing of cows. He told his followers that daughters were the fountainhead of warmth and affection. He further told them that the practice of bartering or selling daughters often resulted in the sufferings of daughters. The latter lost peace and honour in the family. Sometimes, girls sold for marriages were resold by in-laws for pecuniary considerations. Such practices gave rise to the immorality. Consequently, parents suffered humiliations which wrecked their social life.[38] Moreover, the Namdhari Guru exhorted his followers to boycott those people who indulged in these practices. He also told his followers that they should not allow such people to participate in the congregation and nothing should be accepted from their hands. For uprooting these practices, the Namdhari Guru came up with the following solution: Girls should be taught skills of reading and writing; they should be well versed in *gurbani* which would make them spiritually stronger. He further suggested that if you had a daughter, marry her while she was young and send her to the house of her father-in-law. The Namdhari Guru knew that advanced age could reduce the chances of marriages. The longer was the stay of an over-aged daughter in the parents' house the bigger the source of embarrassment she could become for them.[39]

The Namdhari Guru was extremely worried about the menace of prostitution and homosexuality in which the custodians of the Khalsa were trapped. He knew that Maharaja Ranjit Singh, his successors and *Darbaris*

themselves compromised with moral and ethical values for which the Khalsa was appreciated even by its adversaries during the 18th century. He also knew that the Khalsa Fauj, which marginalised the civil authority of the Kingdom of Lahore, created anarchy. Moreover, he himself witnessed this moral depravity and fratricidal killings. It was painful for him to see that the so-called custodians of the Khalsa Raj did not refrain from liquidating revered leaders like Bhai Bir Singh of Naurangabad. Namdhari Guru Ram Singh held Bhai Bir Singh in great esteem. As stated in the beginning, it was the anarchy of the Khalsa Fauj and of Dogra brothers which accelerated the process of collapse of this *Raj*. It was this disgusting situation which forced Ram Singh to quit the service of the Khalsa Raj. After the annexation of the Khalsa Raj by the British, there were a few veterans of this *Raj* who refused to accept the British rule and carried on the torch of freedom. Among them was Bhai Maharaj Singh, who was Bhai Bir Singh's follower. Nevertheless, the protagonists of the Khalsa Raj were opposed and despised by the Sikh *Sardars, Mahants* and *Pujaris* whose vested interests overlapped with those of the British Raj.

The menace of moral depravity assumed dangerous proportions under the British rule because some of the European civil and military personnel were bachelors and those who were married, did not bring their wives and children from England to the places where they were posted. The servants, maid-servants and prostitutes satisfied the sexual desires of these personnel. The life of the military personnel was more lax than that of the civil officials. According to early nineteenth century documents, Ludhiana had the reputation of providing women to all the British regiments stationed there. In a population of not more than 20,000 there were 3,000 prostitutes— that is half the female population was engaged in this occupation. Many of these girls were stolen and brought from the surrounding hill country. Girls from district Ludhiana were bartered as well.[40]

Namdhari Guru censured the indulgence of one of his followers. He sought his explanation and reprimanded him by saying that since he was married what was the urgency for him to stay with a prostitute? Then Namdhari Guru acquainted him with the dangerous effects of such indulgence. Apart from financial loss and loss of honour, he pointed out that since majority of the visitors to these prostitutes happened to be Muslims, there was every possibility that interaction with these people could ultimate convert the Sikhs into Muslims. The Namdhari Guru believed that any person having interaction with the Muslim women of low-caste was going to lose his religion. He noted that in this way many Hindus suffered.[41]

The most pitiable condition was of the widow as she was neither accepted by her parents nor in-laws. Her very presence was considered an ill-omen. Although the custom of *kareva* or *chadar dalna* gave some of them an opportunity to rehabilitate themselves yet they did not enjoy a respectable position in the family and community, as this custom was essentially guided by economic considerations. For instance, in the agrarian society, the brother of deceased husband would marry a widow to keep the landholding of the family intact. If the widow had sons from the previous husband, as per custom, she could claim a share in the landed property of the family. However, the widows were treated with contempt and were not given due regard on social occasions. Nevertheless, the position of widows was usually determined by the type of support they could get from their parents. The Namdhari Guru's response to this problem was moderate. He simply said that if a widow of a Kuka wanted to marry she could remarry a Kuka.

In the wake of social and financial problems of the people, Namdhari Guru Ram Singh reduced the expenditure on a marriage which was Rs 1.25 for tying the knot of the scarf of the bride and the bridegroom and Rs 2.50 for *karah prasad*. He forbade his followers to spend more than thirteen

rupees on a wedding. He made marriage obligatory for his followers.

The Namdhari Guru did not see marriage merely in terms of sexual gratification but as an institution of procreation for the continuity of the social order. The practice of remaining single not only defied social obligation of procreation but also resulted in immorality. In those times a large number of male youngsters were unable to get themselves married partly because of dearth of suitable matches and partly because marriage rituals were too expensive. The former problem was confounded by the less number of females as compared to that of the males. Among the agrarian classes, keeping landholding intact was the primary consideration and it did not allow all male members of a family to marry. Namdhari Guru Ram Singh denounced the practice of remaining single. His inexpensive and simple *Anand-reeti* paved the way for legitimate relations between men and women.

Besides, he advocated that the parents should give education to their children. From the letters which he addressed to his close associates, it appears that he wished that children should learn the gurmukhi script so that they themselves could read *gurbani*. He emphasised that like the boys, the girls should also be given an equal opportunity. Satguru Ram Singh told his illiterate followers that just as collecting one stone a day could raise a big heap, similarly learning one letter a day could make a person literate.[42]

An Early Official Response: House Confinement of Namdhari Guru

In the wake of launching of the above mentioned radical reforms, the British government in 1863 deputed its intelligence staff for gauging the nature and extent of the activities of the Namdhari Guru and his followers. It also directed the Police Superintendents and the Deputy Commissioners of each district to prepare a comprehensive

report of the movements of Namdhari Guru and his followers; the speeches and discourses delivered by them in the religious congregations and the response of the people were under observation. On 15 April 1863, Macnabb, Deputy Commissioner, Sialkot, got an intelligence report about the unusual nature of the activities of the Namdhari Guru. The Intelligence reported that "it was rumoured in that district that an elderly Sikh of Ludhiana, calling himself 'Bhai', was going about the country with 200 men, whom he drilled at night with sticks instead of muskets, that he boasted of 5,000 followers, and obeyed no *Hakim*. They purposed (sic) going with a lot of women, who were also of their party, to the Baisakhi fair at Amritsar."[43] Major Mercer, Deputy Commissioner, Amritsar, also reported that the followers of the Namdhari Guru were sturdy young men, each with a stout stick but the Commissioner did not corroborate the seditious nature of the speeches and activities of Namdhari Guru and his followers. On the other hand, Lieutenant Hamilton, District Superintendent of Police, Firozepur, sent an alarming report about the activities of Namdhari Guru and his followers.

> On 4 June 1863 the *Chaukidar* of village Khota (Khotte), in Firozepur, reported at police station, Bagha Purana, that for two or three days Ram Singh, with 400 or 500 followers, had assembled at his village, and they were behaving in a very extraordinary manner. They said that country would soon be theirs, and they would speedily have 1,25,000 armed men to back them; that they would only take a fifth of the land's produce from the cultivators; and were altogether comporting (sic) themselves in a very extraordinary manner.
>
> A police Sergeant at once reported (sic) to the spot, and found the *Chaukidar's* statement to be quite correct. A number of women were also with them, and took part in all proceedings. Soon after his arrival the meeting gradually disrupted. Subsequently, on 6 June, the

> Assistant Superintendent of Police, when inquired about Ram Singh in Khota, learnt, from the Lambardars of that and neighbouring villages, that he had been talking seditiously.[44]

Captain Elphinstone, Deputy Commissioner, Jalandhar only reported about the leading features of the doctrines of Namdhari Guru Ram Singh. The main focus of his report was on the social reforms of this Guru. Besides, Deputy Commissoner also pointed out the intimacy between sexes; men and women who raved together at his meetings. He also underlines that thousands of women and young girls had joined this sect. Captain Miller, Cantonment Magistrate, Jalandhar, got prepared a secret report through his informer Ganda Singh. The latter visited Bhaini Sahib headquarters and met Sahib Singh, a close confidant of Namdhari Guru Ram Singh. Ganda Singh expressed his desire to meet the Namdhari Guru who was absent. However, he was able to procure two papers from Sahib Singh which were to be delivered to Namdhari Guru. One of such papers read like this:

> No. 1. Salutation. *The 'Sakhi of Guru Gobind Singh'*. I, Guru Gobind Singh, will be born in a carpenter's shop, and will be called Ram Singh. My house will be between the Jamuna and Sutlej rivers. I will declare my religion. I will defeat the Firangis (sic) and put the crown on my own head, and blow the sankh. The musicians shall praise me in 1921 (1894). I, the carpenter, will sit on the throne. When I have got one lakh and twenty-five thousand Sikhs with me, I will cut off the heads of the Firangis (sic). I will never be conquered in battle, and will shout "Akal, Akal". The Christians will desert their wives and fly from the country when they hear the shout of 1½ lakh of Khalsa. As great battle will take place on the banks of the Jamuna, and blood will flow like the waters of the Ravi, and no Firangi (sic) be left

alive. Insurrections will take place in the country in 1922 (1865). The Khalsa will reign, and the Raja and ryot will live in peace and comfort, and no one shall molest another.

Day by day Ram Singh's rule will be enlarged. God has written this. It is no lie, my brethren. In 1865, the whole country will be ruled by Ram Singh. My followers will worship *Vahiguru* (sic). God says this will happen.

No. 2 Salutation, Read the enclosed (i.e. the above) to all Sikhs. It is the request of Sikhs here. Send news of your whereabouts. We wish to see you here. You have been absent a long time. Come in this direction quickly. We can't remain apart from you as long.[45]

Namdhari scholar Nidhan Singh Alam examined the contents of these letters and came to the conclusion that these were false letters. Alam's contention is that Satguru Ram Singh being the *avtar of Ahinsa* i.e. non-violence, could not write such a letter. He also questioned the credibility of Gainda Singh. Sahib Singh was not naïve to give such confidential letter to a stranger like Ganda Singh. Alam strongly believed that these letters were fake.[46] There is no denying the fact that authenticity of the official reports and such letters is questionable, in the sense that British became too apprehensive about the socio-religious activities of the Namdhari Guru and his systematic efforts to mobilise the people. It is also rightly said that after the Uprising of 1857, the British did not want to leave things to chance. They took every possible administrative and socio-economic measures to consolidate their *Raj* in the Punjab.[47] Yet to dismiss these reports saying that they were fake and the construct of the imagination of the informers is to deny the ultimate objective of the Namdhari Guru who wanted to supplant the *Firangi Raj* by the Khalsa Raj. The Namdhari Guru did not want to disclose the ultimate objective and the strategy. Rather he cooperated with the British officials and ensured that his

programme was directed towards social reforms.

In fact, the government was worried about the proposed assembly of Namdhari followers on the occasion of Diwali at Amritsar. Captain Menzies, District Superintendent of Police, Amritsar, reported that the Namdhari followers had begun to perceive their Guru as the incarnation of Guru Gobind Singh. The city police of Amritsar, elicited information from Narain Singh, a follower of Namdhari Guru, that the latter would complete all his plans and

> an insurrection would break out in the city; that he had 40,000 followers in Punjab, able-bodied men, ready to rise; and that the Guru had announced his ability to get arms and even guns when the time came. He acknowledged that Ram Singh drilled his followers, but not at Amritsar, where they could not fail to be detected, and that he had a regular postal arrangement throughout the Punjab, from village to village, but never used the post office.[48]

Nevertheless, the government could not gather the substantial evidence on which it could arrest the Namdhari Guru or deport him outside Punjab. The government was not sure about the response of the people in case an action was taken against the Namdhari Guru. At the same time, it was aware of the rising popularity of the Namdhari Guru among the people. For curtailing his free movements, the government ordered that he should not be allowed to move outside his native village Bhaini.

The Namdhari Guru did not react to the official decision nor did his followers behave aggressively. Rather, they slowed down their activities and projected the image as if they were peace-loving devotees. It is said that they continued their activities secretly. The Namdhari Guru himself pondered over the situation and understood the urgency of maintaining communication with his followers. He was aware of the importance of maintaining secrecy

regarding the links or communications to be passed on to his followers. For this reason, he used the traditional system of communication which was once in vogue in pre-British time. According to the official report the details of Kukas' *dak* system are as follows:

> The 'Kookas', or as they are sometimes called the 'Sant Khalsa', have a private post of their own which appears to be admirably organised. Confidential letters are circulated much in the same way as the fiery cross was carried through by a highland clan in Scottish in olden days. A Kuka, on the arrival at his village of another of the same sect with a dispatch, at once leaves off whatever work he may be engaged in; if in the midst of a repast, not another morsel is eaten; he asks no question, but taking the message starts off at a run and conveys it to the next relief, or to his destination. Important communications are sent verbally and not in writing. In carrying messages, they are said (sic) by Major Perkins, to make great detours, to avoid the Grand Trunk Road. There can be little doubt that though this machinery has been introduced to work a religious reform, yet in the hands of designing and unscrupulous men it can easily be made an engine of political power. Reports have reached Major Perkins that the Kookas openly talk of being masters of the country at some time when all the land will profess the new faith.[49]

Besides, the Namdhari Guru also delegated the authority of administering *amrit* to the *subas* or other confidants so that the process of propagation as well as bringing the people into the fold of Namdhari mission could continue.

Assertion of Fearlessness of Kukas

After some time, the followers of the Namdhari Guru resorted to destruction of tombs and graveyards. In the state of religious frenzy the Kukas recited the following couplets

which reflected their aggressive attitude towards the tombs and graveyards. Some of the popular couplets are as follow:

a. *Murhee musseetan dhahke Kurdeo Maidan* (Pull down tombs and masjids, into level fields).
b. *Pahel maro Pir Bunnoe, Phir Maro Sooltana* (First annihilate or throw down Pir Bunnoe, later do the same to Sooltana).
c. *Oomut Subhee Mohamdedee Khap Jai maidan* (All the followers of the Prophet will disappear at once).
d. *Soonut Koi Nakarsukka Kumbun Turkana* (Trembling Turks will not in future be able to circumcise).
e. *Bhainee, Satguru Jages aur jhut jahana* (The true Guru has arisen in Bhaini; the rest of the world is full of lie).[50]

The destruction of tombs took place during 1866. Waryam Singh, Fateh Singh and Jaimal Singh destroyed the tombs lying between the boundaries of the villages of Chuhar Bhaini and Choote Barrshoo in Firozepur on 1 September 1866. One of the tombs had been constructed to commemorate Sangoor Singh who was respected by the local people. These three Kukas were arrested and produced before the magistrate who sentenced them to three months imprisonment with a fine of twenty rupees each, or six months more imprisonment in case of non-payment. In October 1866, a Kuka namely Maluk Singh tried to damage some tombs in Firozepur district. But a Lambardar named Sobha Singh informed the police that such kind of disturbances may take place in Talwandi, Mukatsar or Amritsar. However, neither the damage done to the tomb nor apprehension of disturbance was ascertained by the police.

Several cases of destruction of tombs were reported in Ludhiana district in July 1866. The targets of the Kukas were small graveyards or burial places. The police could prosecute the defaulters only in two cases of destruction. Similarly, the Kukas of village Subhana in Sialkot district destroyed some graveyards. They were let off by Deputy Commissioner

after giving them a warning. On 5 January, three Kukas were apprehended for damaging graves at Chawindah. In Gujranwala district, several cases of destruction were reported. Some of the Kukas involved in the destruction were put on trial. From Hoshiarpur it was reported that

> "a party of thirteen Kukas led by Soodh Singh, entered the district and destroyed some Hindu dieties in a temple at Gunharee. At Noor Jumal a Mohammadan tomb was destroyed, and some of the party were seen astride the image of cow in front of a Hindu temple: these profane riders called upon cow to prove itself a God by walking. The men were sent up for trial, and convicted by the Assistant Commissioner as vagrants."[51]

In the eyes of Kukas, the worship of tombs and graves by the Sikhs was a breach of the teachings of Sikh Gurus. The Namdhari Guru reiterated the same message to his followers. Harjot Oberoi appreciates the relevance of these actions of the Kukas in the following words:

> First, Kuka reasoning seems to have been that a powerful way of questioning the sacredness and power of these spots was to demolish them and show the rural population that Kuka zealots remained unharmed after the sacrilege. Second, they went about their task in broad daylight, when their actions would be noticed. The aim of the whole exercise appears to have been to preach through deeds and wean rural folk away from the practice of worshipping at village sites. In the absence of alternative channels of communication, desecration of village sites became an effective mode of advertising the Kuka cause. Third, the targets against which Kuka Sikhs directed their wrath were associated with their own lineage and probably frequented by fellow clan members for worship. These village sites were mutually shared for worship by all village inhabitants—Sikh, Muslim and Hindu—particularly if they were efficacious in granting boons.[52]

Pilgrimages to Sikh Historical Shrines

The Namdhari Guru did not want to miss any opportunity to visit Sikh historical shrines. It seems that he was trying to bring himself at centre stage of religious congregations which were held on some special occasions. Since he was not allowed to leave his headquarters, the Namdhari Guru sought permission to pay his homage to Mukatsar on the occasion of *Maghi* once again. However, the government refused to accept his request. In responding to the official action, the Namdhari Guru decided to hold a fair at his own headquarters and sent Suba Lakha Singh to Lahore for seeking official permission. The government was in a fix. Major Perkins, District Superintendent of Police, Ludhiana, was of the opinion that if the proposed gathering was to be moderate, there was no harm in conceding to Namdhari Guru's request. At the same time, the government and its allies were not prepared to give any opportunity to Namdhari Guru to project his image among the masses. Therefore, the government permitted Namdhari Guru to visit Anandpur Sahib on the occasion of *Holla Mohalla* in March 1867 when Lakha Singh, *Zamindar* of Bhaini gave the following assurance to the official:

> that he is a man of good character and a well-wisher of the Government, and has never been guilty of any fault (sic). He now wants to go to Anundpore, in the Hoshiarpur district and it is probable that many people will come to pay their respects to him. He will remain there one day, and then return. He will give no trouble (*Nuksan*) to government, and there shall not be any whatever. He, therefore, requests permission to go to Anundpore, and asks that no impediment be put on the way of people coming to salute him, and brings to notice that, if he is not permitted to go to this place, then people will come to his village (Bhaini), and in this case begs that they may not be stopped.[53]

Meanwhile, the Lieutenant Governor of Punjab directed Commissioners, Deputy Commissioners and Superintendents of Police of Lahore, Jalandhar and Hoshiarpur to make necessary police arrangements for keeping control over the proceedings at the fair, especially the movements of Namdhari Guru and his followers. Colonel McAndrew, Deputy Inspector General of Police, Lahore Circle, moved towards Jalandhar and then Hoshiarpur and directed Commissioner of Jalandhar and Deputy Commissioner Perkins, Hoshiarpur, to move along with police force to Anandpur. Besides, Sardar Bahadur Attar Singh, Officer Sheredil Regiment, Kutab Shah, Inspector of Police, Ferozepur and Fatehdin Khan, Inspector, Amritsar district, the rest of the police force was entirely comprised of Muslim and Hindu Rajput sepoys. On 17 March, Colonel McAndrew encamped at a convenient spot within a short distance of the Kesgarh Sahib. On 18 March, he and Perkins met Hari Singh, *Mahant* of Gurdwara Kesgarh Sahib, who strongly objected to the admission of Kukas to the Gurdwaras. However, McAndrew and Perkins told Hari Singh

> that the temple being open to Sikhs and Hindoos of every denomination, we could see no cause why the Kukas should be excluded by us on the part of the government. After a good deal of talking, the *mahant's* objections were reduced and he said that the Kukas should not uncover their heads, shout or do anything contrary to the customs of the shrine, and that if they came and went like other Sikhs he had no objection to urge.[54]

Moreover, McAndrew and Perkins also told the *Mahant* that there should be no disturbance on the part of *Nihangs* who had gathered over there.

On 19 March, the Namdhari Guru Ram Singh reached Anandpur accompanied by 21 *subas*, horse riders and *sangat* comprising of 2,500 people. They were moving along with the flag posts and drums. As he moved in front of the camp,

McAndrew and Perkins directed Sudh Singh, who was leading the procession, to move to the camp. The Namdhari Guru immediately directed his followers to get down from the horse backs and stop the procession. A meeting between Namdhari Guru and these officials took place for some hours. The Namdhari Guru was told to comply with the above mentioned conditions put forth by Mahant Hari Singh. He was not ready to agree to these conditions but at the same time, he did not want to create an unpleasant situation. It was agreed that Namdhari Guru could pay his homage at the Gurdwara Kesgarh Sahib along with his hundred followers. The next morning when he and his followers moved towards the Gurdwara, the *Nihangs* tried to obstruct the procession, but noticing the presence of the police, retreated.

On 20 March, Namdhari Guru wrote a letter in gurmukhi to the *Pujaris* of Gurdwara Kesgarh Sahib and wanted to know the reasons for their refusal to perform *ardas* on his behalf in the Gurdwara. The *Pujaris* verbally told the Namdhari Guru that there were following religious differences for their refusal:

1. That he sets himself a God.
2. That when making a convert, he does not give him *Umrut* to drink, as is the custom, but he whispers a *muntur* in his ear.
3. That when he makes a convert, he says to him: *'Junum Guru Huzroo, ur bashee Guru Bhainee'* (Guru's birth place is Hazroo and he is a resident of Bhaini) whereas the Sikhs say: *'Junum Guroo Patna, ur Bashee Gooroo Nundpore'* (Guru's birth place is Patna and he is a resident of Anandpur).
4. That whereas the Sikhs entering a place of worship do not untie their hair or remove their turbans, Kukas do.
5. That Kukas in exciting themselves to such a degree as to be at times insensible act like *Mahomedan Faqueers*, and cannot be Gooroo Sikhs.[55]

As Meer Fazl Hussain, Inspector of Police, Hoshiarpur district informs us that the Namdhari Guru countered the above allegations saying that the lifestyle of the *Pujaris* was not according to the Sikh religion as they consumed meat, drinking, and indulged in immoral practices. Moreover, they also practised female infanticide.[56]

Namdhari Guru Ram Singh's visit to Anandpur was a success in terms of scoring a moral victory over the lifestyle of the *Pujaris*. He strongly believed in the spirit of Sikhism rather than emphasis on its form. It was also a success in terms of demonstrating the mass following of the Kukas comprising of 8,000, of whom about two-thirds were men, and one-third women and children. Moreover, the Namdhari Guru's spiritual message made an appeal to the then Sodhis too. Partap Singh of Rasauli and his sons Deva Singh, Sodhi Narinder Singh of Kurali and Sodhi Hira Singh expressed their willingness to become Kukas. The Namdhari Guru converted about fifty people including some Muslims.

Consolidation of Namdhari Organisation: Suba System

The most significant measure for the propagation of the programme of socio-religious reforms was the appointment of *subas*. The Namdhari Guru realised that he should have a team of deputies and local leaders to carry on his missionary work. In the initial stage, he formed a council comprising six members and assigned the task of propagation in their respective areas: Jawahar Singh in Amritsar; Kahn Singh in Nabha, Patiala and Sangrur; Sahib Singh and Brahma Singh in the Majha region; Sudh Singh and Lakha Singh in Doaba.[57] Later on, he evolved the suba-system appointing seventeen deputies in different areas of Punjab. Giani Gian Singh thought that the Namdhari Guru was adopting the Mughal Suba system, whereas Namdhari scholars equate his Suba system with *Manji*-system of Guru Amardas.[58] Nevertheless, in each district there was one *Suba* who coordinated the work of the local functionaries. Next to the *Subas* were *Naib-Subas*,

Jathedars, Granthis and local *sangats.* According to Fauja Singh,

> "Naib Subas and Jathedars were given smaller areas to operate in and were required to organise and supervise the missionary work of their respective places. The local *sangats* constituted the base of the Kuka organisation. A *sangat* was a society composed of the Kukas living in a particular village, which had a *dharamsala* (temple) of its own and a Granthi (scripture-reciter) to look after it and to teach gurmukhi letters and Gurbani (Sikh scripture) to the members of the *sangat* and their children, organised regular congregations and ran a free kitchen to feed the visitors from outside."[59]

The Namdhari Guru assigned these *subas* the task of: a) propagating the Namdhari mission, administering *bhajan* and *amrit* (rites of initiation) and making arrangements for performing *paths* (b) settling the local disputes with utmost impartiality c) collecting *daswand* d) ensuring peace in their respective areas and e) bringing cases of disobedience and self styled persons to the notice of guru. Presumably, the *subas* performed these duties to their guru's satisfaction. However, in the post independence period, the *subas* and other functionaries were not as politically active as they used to be under Namdhari Guru Ram Singh. Now they confined themselves to the socio-religious activities.

Namdhari Guru's march comprising 8,000 followers to Anandpur Sahib indicates the increasing number of Namdhari Sikhs. The contemporary vernacular newspapers *Ushruf-ul-Akhbar* (Delhi) and *Nujum-ool-Akhbar* (Meerut) reported that Namdhari Guru converted 30,000 to 60,000 people. Although, these newspapers do not give information about the background of these converts, yet it is clear that the Namdhari Guru was mobilising the people on a massive scale. His mobilising activities are also indicated by the fact that he organised a fair on the occasion of *Dussehra* at Bhaini

Sahib, where three thousand Kukas participated. The following *subas* also attended his fair: Kahn Singh, Lakha Singh, Sada Singh, Natha Singh, Sahib Singh, Jawahar Singh, Khazan Singh, Vazir Singh and Narain Singh.[60] The mass gathering indicated the popularity of the Namdhari Guru. The official report stated that the Namdhari Guru had attained status of *avtar* and called himself *mard ka chela*. These words occur in a verse of Guru Nanak which he addressed to Bhai Lalo when Babar attacked Hindustan.[61]

Although the context in which Guru Nanak Dev recited this verse was different yet its use by the Namdhari Guru shows his resurgence. This resurgence can also be attributed to the propagation of his mission by his *subas*. At Anandpur excepting two, the rest of the twenty *subas* were present which added grandeur to the personality of their spiritual master. These *subas* were authorised by the Namdhari Guru to give *gurmantar* to the people. One version of this *gurmantar* stated by the official report was like this: It is said that 'every Kuka must repeat this *muntur* one hundred thousand times within nine Sundays after his conversion; after which he becomes a perfect Kuka'.[62]

We have statistical information of the prominent *subas* and activists who were operating in different areas of the British Punjab and Native States. In 1867, there were 93 Namdhari leaders and activists operating in the districts of Ambala, Ludhiana, Ferozepur including Patiala, Nabha and Jind state. Next to Malwa region was the Central Punjab comprising Jalandhar, Hoshiarpur, Amritsar, Lahore and Gurdaspur. The total number of prominent Namdhari leaders and activists were one hundred and ten in 1867. In the districts of Sialkot, Rawalpindi, Montgomery, Lyallpur, Sargodha, Sheikhupura, Peshawar and Multan, there were more than hundred Namdhari activists and leaders.

In the 1860s, the mission of the Namdhari Guru had become a popular movement. The official reports started pouring in the offices of Commissioners and Deputy

Commissioners that the number of his followers was increasing rapidly.

> "In Ambala, Captain Harris, District Superintendent of Police, noticed that prior to 1866 there were a few Kukas in the district, but the tenets of the new faith had largely gained credence of late in the pergunnahs of Amballa and Ladhowal, where now might be found some 15 villages composed almost of believers in Ram Singh's creed. The population of these villages be estimated at 4,000, consisting principally of the lower castes such as Ramdassias, Tirkhans Lohars and Jats. Sood Singh and Kan Singh seem to be the *Soubhas* usually deputed to Umbala (*sic*)."[63]

Celebrating Diwali at Amritsar, October 1867

Namdhari Guru's visit to Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, was an important event in ways more than one. He reached Amritsar on 25 October 1867 accompanied by his father Jassa Singh, his wife and daughter and more than twelve Namdhari Singhs. Before his arrival, about eight hundred Namdhari Sikhs had already reached Amritsar. Arrangements for his stay were made outside Chatiwind area. Within two days (26-27 October), the number of his followers increased to twelve hundred. It is said that about three thousand Sikhs had already been putting up in the Bungas in the complex of Harmandir Sahib and other places of Amritsar city. Another important feature of his followers was that the Namdhari Guru was accompanied by his *subas*. There is a conflicting report regarding the number of *subas* who attended the Diwali fair. One report mentions eleven, whereas, the second report mentions twenty-two *subas*. Since the Namdhari Guru stayed at Amritsar for more than a month, therefore, there is a possibility that other *subas* might have come to see their spiritual master on every other day. The caste, occupation and age group of these *subas* is noteworthy. More than 63 percent *subas* were agriculturists. Next to them were carpenters comprising 22.72 percent and

the rest of them were one Brahmin, one *Udasi Sadh* and one potter. This composition also implies that the focus of propaganda of the Namdhari Guru was on the rural people. However, there was a marginal impact on the urban area too. Moreover, it shows that the Namdhari Guru was conscious of the age factor too. The average age group of these *subas* was 38.5 years which shows that close confidants of Namdhari Guru were in the age of middle order excepting three who, too were in their late twenties (see table at page no. 80).

On reaching Amritsar, the Namdhari Guru was informed to meet Commissioner and Police Inspector who made arrangements for ensuring that the Diwali fair passed off peacefully. Police Inspector, Narain Singh, accompanied the Namdhari Guru wherever he went. The Guru was told that he could go anywhere he liked but if he wished to visit the Darbar Sahib, he should go in the early morning and with 50 followers only. It was on 27 October that the Namdhari Guru went to the temple with about 50 followers but when he reached the premises of Darbar Sahib, the number increased to between 200 and 300. In recognising his religious character, *Mahants* of Darbar Sahib gave him a *doshala* (shawl) and a *pagree* (turban) from Jhanda Bunga. The Namdhari Guru was admitted at the temple and other places of worships located around the tank (sarovar) excepting at Akal Bunga. Narain Singh informs us that the Namdhari Guru offered two rupees at Akal Bunga. When he presented his offerings at the Bunga, *Pujaris* refused to perform *ardas* on his behalf till he atoned for his religious lapses. The Namdhari Guru refused to comply with the allegations of the *Pujaris*. On 28 October, the Namdhari Guru again visited Darbar Sahib. When a policeman obstructed the march of his followers, Bhai Lakha Singh, a close confidant of the Namdhari Guru, lost his temper and abused the policeman. The Namdhari Guru avoided the unpleasant situation and restrained Bhai Lakha Singh.

After paying his homage at Darbar Sahib, the Namdhari Guru stayed in his Bunga for some time. Sardar Shamsher Singh Sandhawalia and his brother Sardar Thakur Singh Sandhawalia came to see him. It is said that they made some offerings to him and held a conversation with him. Although we do not know the nature of the details of the conversation yet the meeting of these Sardars was in itself a significant indicator of the growing response that the landed gentry showed to the Namdhari mission. Besides these two, a large number of native gentry and traders, and other people of Amritsar visited the Namdhari Guru and presented him with offerings to the value of seven hundred rupees. The Namdhari Guru also received twelve *thans* (pieces) of fine cloth. He distributed three hundred fifty rupees and blankets to his followers. Among these people were Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs and Reverend, Clark and Storks.

During his stay at Amritsar, the Namdhari Guru converted 2,000 people including women and children. Since the number of these converts was large, he administered *gurmantar* in the ears of converts and asked them to repeat the word *"Vahi Guru ji ka Khalsa"* loudly. Meanwhile, the police officials tried to elicit some response from the Namdhari Guru and his followers which smacked of their anti-British sentiments. Colonel McAndrew enquired from Sardar Mangal Singh Ramgarhia, Honorary Magistrate and guardian of the temple and from several other Sikh gentlemen what they thought of the Namdhari Guru. All of them stated that he was 'well-disposed and inoffensive man'. However, they did not express any favourable opinion regarding some of his *mahants* or *subas*, particularly Sahib Singh and Lakha Singh.[64]

Motives of Namdhari Guru to Visit Sikh Historical Shrines

What were the motives of the Namdhari Guru in undertaking the tours to the Sikh historical shrines and places? Reproducing the police reports, Dr Ganda Singh

makes us believe that Bhai Ram Singh wished that *Mahants, Pujaris* and *Sarbrah* of Sikh historical shrines like Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, would recognise him as 'guru' and accord the same status which Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh enjoyed. Dr Ganda Singh's statement is based upon the statement of Meer Fazl Hussain, Police Inspector, Hoshiarpur. The actual statement of this Police Inspector was *Piran Ra Muridan Me Parranand* which has been translated as '*Pirs* (holy men) are not worthy of worship, but their disciples cause them to be worshipped'. The context of Meer Fazl's statement was stated by Lieutenant Colonel G. Hutchinson, Inspector General of Police, Punjab, who submitted his report to T.H. Thornton, Secretary to Government, Punjab, Civil Department on 19 January 1869. He said that the followers of Namdhari Guru, particularly his *subas* preached that their 'guru' was not merely a man 'but the very incarnation of the deity co-equal with Guru Gobind Singh and Guru Nanak, of sainted, memory to every Sikh.' Stating Namdhari Guru's objectives in visiting sacred temples in Hoshiarpur and Amritsar districts, Inspector General of Police said that one of the Ram Singh's objectives in wishing liberty to go wherever he pleased was to visit the sacred temples at Anandpur, Mukatsar and Amritsar, where he hoped the guardians of the shrines and the Sikh hierophants would publicly acknowledge him as a guru, and accord him similar honour and position as they had done with Guru Gobind Singh, and Guru Nanak. The results of these pilgrimages have grievously disappointed him indeed.[65]

Such police reports need some examination. If we see the entire report submitted by the Inspector General of Police, we can safely say that the above mentioned motives of the Namdhari Guru are actually inferences drawn by the police officers. In fact, we do not have his statements for corroborating such motives. Of course, we have other contemporary sources like the Panth Parkash by Giani Gian

Singh, *Sau-Sakhi* and Namdhari literature which corroborate that the Namdhari followers perceived as if Guru Gobind Singh had appeared in the form of Ram Singh. Similarly, these sources confirm that the Namdhari Guru revived that maryada of Sant Khalsa which was in vogue in Hazur Sahib, Nanded. Being a true Sikh, it was a legitimate exercise on the part of the Namdhari Guru to pay homage to the Sikh historical shrines and places and hold religious discourses over there. Moreover, launching the programme of social reform by the Namdhari Guru also fell within the Sikh traditions.

Nevertheless, in the wake of rising popularity of the Namdhari Guru, the police officials began to highlight the religious differences between him and the priestly class on the one hand and character assassination of the Namdhari Guru and his followers on the other. The reports of the police officials make us believe that the 'innovations' made by the Namdhari Guru in regard to the maryada, particularly administering *Khande-di-Pahul*, made him unpopular among the Sikhs. Similarly, the cases of murder of Ram Devi, Namdhari Guru's daughter and of Chando, a female protagonist of Kukaism, exposed moral ethics of the Kukas. Consequently, the Sikhs began to suspect the activities of the Kukas and did not show enthusiasm to become Kukas. These two cases were exceptional in the sense that neither the enthusiasm of the Namdhari Guru nor of his followers declined. Rather, the incidence of Tharajwala showed that the Kukas were becoming impatient to take up cudgels against the British.

Assertion of Independence of Kuka Sikhs: Incident of Tharajwala, February 1869

In February 1869, the Police Superintendent of Ferozepur district, Turton Smith, reported that several Kukas were gathering near village Rupana in Ferozepur district. It was stated that the *Lambardar* of that village had burnt some

spinning wheels, a charpoy, and a plough, part of a cart, etc., and deserted his home. He proceeded with a body of Kukas in the direction of Tharajwala, a village in Sirsa district. Anticipating disturbances on the part of the Kukas, Diwan Baksh, Deputy Inspector of Police followed the Kuka party. After some days, it was reported that the Kukas had set upon him for observing their movements. The Kukas attacked Diwan Baksh damaging his sword and injuring his horse. One Bili Singh struck Diwan Baksh with an axe or a stick, and Mana Singh threw a spear at him. A constable who accompanied the Deputy Inspector was assaulted, his sword broken and taken from him, and his coat cut through with a blow from the blade. This incident took place near Kuraiwala (Sirsa). Diwan Baksh reported that the party of Kukas used the most seditious language, and proclaimed the Khalsa reign setting all authority at defiance. The immediate provocation of this attack were the derogatory remarks of Meer Baksh against the Namdhari Guru.

Turton Smith and Wakefield, Assistant Commissioner, collected a large force of police comprising twenty foot police and fifteen mounted police accompanied by European officers. The police force arrived at Mukatsar where it was joined by the acting Tehsildar, Alam Shah and Sodhi Mann Singh. It seems that the police wanted to avoid a clash with the Kukas and tried to negotiate through Inspector Kutab Shah near village Tharajwala. The Inspector approached Maluk Singh of Phulianwala who was a leading Kuka of moderate views. But Maluk Singh expressed his inability to persuade the Kukas to surrender. He suggested that it was Mastan Singh of Tharajwala who could be useful for this purpose. Mastan Singh had emerged as an independent Kuka leader and enjoyed the support of a large number of those Kukas. It was reported that these Kukas (more than 44) disposed off their land holdings and collected their gold and silver ornaments and cash too. They put all their belongings at the disposal of Mastan Singh. According to

the police report, Mastan Singh was 'disgusted with Ram Singh's inaction' and thought of restoring the Khalsa rule. Mastan Singh himself became aggressive when he demanded that Kutab Shah should surrender his horse as *nazarana*. Moreover, he ridiculed the Inspector for his belief that the English would assist him. Rather Mastan Singh advised him to desert his falling Government and throw in his lot with the rising Kuka cause. The Kukas were so excited that they presented turbans to the *lambardars* of Tharajwala and requested them to join the movement. However, the presence of European officers and the police had the desired effect on Mastan Singh and other Kukas. They surrendered before the European officers and were disarmed and arrested. They were taken into custody at the police station of Malaut, in Sirsa district. These 44 prisoners were placed on trial before the Deputy Commissioner of Ferozepur. The Commissioner of Lahore instructed the Deputy Commissioner that these prisoners should be tried for 'rioting and not for attempting to wage war'. The Deputy Commissioner was also instructed that only a few of them should be awarded with severe sentences.

Mastan Singh, Bela Singh and Beli Singh of Tharajwala, Bachittar Singh of Kuraiwala, Harnam Singh (Sirsa), Mana Singh of Channu (Sirsa), Sarmukh Singh of Bholwala (Mukatsar) were awarded various fines and imprisonments. The rest of the Kukas were released without trial.[66]

Although the British government, for administrative reasons, deliberately played down the implication of this incident at Tharajwala yet it indicated that the mission of the Namdhari Guru was not merely socio-religious. His motive to inculcate the martial spirit among his followers was clearly perceptible in the activities of Kukas in villages of Mukatsar, Ferozepur and Sirsa. They were ready to take on the British Raj. Moreover, this incident also shows the British policy of appeasing the loyalists and punishing the rebels. For instance, the British government confiscated the

valuable articles (gold/silver) and cash of these rebels whereas Sodhi Mann Singh was awarded with Honorary Magistracy for the loyal services rendered by him in this case. Some of the villagers were also given awards.

Consolidation and Expansion of the Mission

Namdhari Guru Ram Singh outwitted surveillance agencies which tried to convince the British government that Kukaism in Punjab was on the decline. Far from it, the Namdhari Guru could erode the loyalty of a section of the landed Sikh gentry to the British Raj. In 1869, he held a *holla* at Manawal in district Sialkot where 1,800 Namdhari Sikhs assembled. As per routine, sessions of *shabad bani* and *katha-kirtan* were performed. He himself delivered religious discourses which made an appeal to the local *Sardars* and *Jagirdars*. Important among them were Sardar Lehna Singh Gharjakhia, son-in-law of Sardar Hari Singh Nalva and son of Moti Singh; Sardar Tara Singh, cousin of former Governor of Suba Peshawar; Sardar Mann Singh, son of Sardar Budh Singh, Rais of Manawal; Zaildar Anokh Singh and Lambardar Amrik Singh of Chuharkana; Lambardar Jawahar Singh (of Saharanpur); Lambardar Raja Singh (of Manhes); Mehtab Singh, Ahla Lambardar of Shekhwan and Buta Singh Lambardar of Manga. Subsequently, Diwan Buta Singh of Lahore city became a close confidant of the Namdhari Guru and a protagonist of the Namdhari mission. He was the son of Gurdial Singh and was a *Kalal* by caste. Buta Singh was the personal attendant of Maharani Jindan, mother of Maharaja Dalip Singh. He was arrested by the British for being involved in the rebellion in Multan. He was awarded seven years' imprisonment for inciting people against the British. After spending seven years in Allahabad Fort, he came back to Lahore. He owned huge property and founded a press and also brought out a law periodical in 1866. He also established printing presses in Peshawar and Ajmer. His printing press in Ajmer published Government

Name	Father's Name	Caste/ Occupation	Age (years)	Area of their Propaganda
Labh Singh	Jita Singh	Cultivator	40	Jalandhar, Amritsar
Lakha Singh	Ram Singh	Cultivator	28	Hoshiarpur, Jalandhar
Ramjass	Nanak Chand	Brahmin	70	Ludhiana
Sahib Singh	Dyal Singh	Carpenter	34	Personal attendant of Namdhari Guru
Kahn Singh Nihang	Natha Singh	Cultivator	60	Hoshiarpur, Ambala, Malwa and Kohistan
Narain Singh	Sant Singh	Carpenter	32	Mukatsar and Ferozepur
Hukma Singh	Mohar Singh	Cultivator	25	Ludhiana, Majha
Pahara Singh	Hema	Cultivator	37	Ludhiana, Gujranwala
Jawahar Singh	Dhool Singh	Cultivator	46	Ferozepur and adjacent places
Samund Singh	Wasava Singh	Cultivator	40	Ferozepur
Aroor Singh	Dyal Singh	Carpenter	40	Amritsar
Wasava Singh	Kharak Singh	Cultivator	50	Karnal and Ambala districts
Hukmi (Bibi)	D/o Rattan Singh	Cultivator	20	Hoshiarpur, Amritsar and other districts
Jota Singh	Ratna Singh	Potter	35	Sialkot and Lahore
Gopal Singh	Sahib Singh	Cultivator	35	Ludhiana
Brahma Singh	Gulab Singh	Cultivator	45	Jalandhar, Gujranwala, Lahore, Sialkot
Khazan Singh	Manee	Carpenter	35	Lahore, Amritsar
Sarmukh Singh	Wasava Singh	Carpenter	30	Patiala territory
Harnam Singh	Assa Singh	Cultivator	28	Jind and Patiala states
Jamiat Singh	Chanda Singh	Cultivator	50	Sialkot and adjacent districts
Maluk Singh		Cultivator	35	Ferozepur
Sadhu Singh		Udasi Sadh	32	Ludhiana district

Gazetteer. Being a close confidant of Satguru Ram Singh, he printed several copies of *Adi-Granth* and other Sikh texts.[67]

In Gurdaspur too, local influential leaders became Namdhari Sikhs. The Bedis of Dera Baba Nanak were those traditional leaders who traced their lineage to Guru Nanak Dev. Kartar Singh Bedi became Namdhari and was appointed *Suba*. Zaildar Hari Singh of Singhpura was *Naib-Suba*. Being an influential person in his area, he brought several Bedi Sahibzade like Amar Singh, Partap Singh, Jagir Singh and Gurdas Singh into the Namdhari fold. His two sons, Narain Singh and Sham Singh, were also Kukas. Moreover, his persuasion brought people of several villages like Thetherke, Pakhoke, Chornawali, Panua and Khokhar into the Namdhari fold. Bhai Gobind Ram of Shri Hargobindpur and his brother became staunch Kukas. [68]

Lambardar Mehtab Singh of Uboke, Amritsar was a successful Namdhari preacher. Sardar Naina Singh of village Wariah was one of the close confidants of Namdhari Guru Ram Singh. Some of the Sikhs of villages Thaths, Kakkar and Lopoke were impressed by Baba Mehtab Singh's morality and became Namdharis.

Sardar Mann Singh of village Purheeran, district Hoshiarpur was one of those Namdhari *Jagirdars* who faced opposition from his own brothers. His cousin Bhai Hamir Singh was a police informer. In spite of this opposition, Sardar Mann Singh organised *hollas* and performed *bhogs* of the *Adi-Granth*. Sardar Chanda Singh was another *Jagirdar* of Kalubahar, Thana Hariana (Hoshiarpur) who followed Namdhari practices.

The Namdhari influences was widespread in district Ferozepur. Kahn Singh of village Baja (Faridkot) and Deva Singh of Dhurkot were heads of Namdhari *sangat*. Sodhi Fateh Singh, *Jagirdar* of Chuogavan (Moga) and his brother Hira Singh, Suba Mann Singh Saidoke, Thana Nihal Singhwala were prominent and financially well off Namdhari Sikhs. Similarly, Mistri Nihal Singh of Ferozepur

city was known both for his wealth and character. [69]

As a consequence of continuous efforts made by the Namdhari Guru and missionary *jathas* for spreading the Namdhari *maryada* and its hegemony, thousands of Sikhs of district Ludhiana became Kukas. The villages, Khatra and Raipur, were major centres of the Namdhari Sikhs. In addition to the above, Kukas of villages Raian (Sahnewal), Johal (Ranikot) and Machhiwara were under police surveillance. The Lambardars of Machhiwara and Khanna were prominent. Jagirdar Bishan Singh of Kotla, Ajmer became Kuka. Several pattis of big villages like Dalla, Malla, Rasulpur and Kaunke were dominated by the Kukas.[70]

In district Ambala, there were several *zamindars* and *jagirdars* who became Kukas. For instance, Attar Singh was *Jagirdar* of Kot Kachhva. He was a retired Police Inspector. Sardar Dal Singh was *Lambardar* of Jhamari. Baba Khushdial Singh was *Zamindar* of village Kheri (Tharajwala), district Sirsa. He was known for his liberal charity.

The above paragraphs clearly show that the Namdhari Guru was able to mobilise the *Zamindars, Jagirdars* and *Ahalkars* and *Rais* of different areas. It were they who sponsored the Namdhari *hollas* and *diwans* since they were resourceful persons. The religio-political affiliations of the local leaders towards Namdhari Guru became a serious matter for the British government since the latter was trying to consolidate its *Raj* in terms of blending the interests of the landed gentry with those of the *Raj*. The Namdhari Guru's policy ran against the official policy. However, in the wake of state-repression, well off section of Namdhari following disassociated itself from Kukaism. Either it remained neutral or sided with the British subsequently.

Formation of *Mastana Dal*

Meanwhile, a large number of those Kukas who had joined civil and police services of the British Raj and of the native states began to show their discontentment with the service

conditions. For them serving their spiritual master was more important than serving the rulers. Some of them resolved to quit their jobs. Important among these were Hira Singh and Lehna Singh who left their jobs in the Patiala State and dedicated their lives to the Kuka movement. Hira Singh formed a group of those Namdhari Sikhs who were known for their austerity and unconditional loyalty to Namdhari Guru Ram Singh. This group came to be known as *Mastana Dal*. There were other important Kukas; Wasawa Singh, Bhoop Singh, Waryam Singh and Anoop Singh. The aim of this group is not clearly known in the Namdhari literature.

Building Rapport with Native States: Jammu and Nepal

The British government was caught unaware about the foreign contacts of the Namdhari Guru. In November 1869, the official report mentioned that the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir was raising a Kuka regiment and that each recruit received a certificate from Namdhari Guru Ram Singh before setting out for Kashmir. It was too serious a matter for the government to overlook. The Government of Punjab reported to the Secretary, Government of India, that the Inspector General of Police had been instructed to keep movements of these men under watch. However, the police officials took a year to collect information about the Kuka companies raised by the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir. In its demi-official letter dated 5 October 1871 it was reported that

> last year the Maharaja got up two Kuka companies, comprising of two hundred men, with the intention of making them the nucleus of a regular Kuka regiment (sic), just in the same way as he has regular regiments of (illegible) and Dogras. He ordered those whom he sent to Punjab to recruit, 'to get men of fine physique and good families'; his idea being that, by having men of good family, he could, through their influence, get their relatives in like manner to enlist for his service. The two hundred

men stayed at Jammu for a while and were then transferred to Srinagar. During their stay there, they were much pampered and petted. Presents were frequently bestowed on them irrespective of their pay and a prominent place was assigned to any who liked to go to Darbar. It was no uncommon thing for them to attend Darbar after morning parade. Suddenly in the autumn of last year, at three days' notice, they were removed to Muzaffarabad, where it is believed that they were not treated as before. This hasty removal is attributed by one of my informants to a remark of a British officer overheard by someone who reported it to the official, to the effect that he was surprised at the Maharaja employing men whom the British Government would not take into its ranks. So far as can be ascertained, no recruits have arrived from Punjab during the present years. [71]

A sudden removal of the Kuka regiment by the Maharaja underlined the urgency for the British to know the origin of the formation of this regiment. The District Superintendent of Police, Gujranwala interrogated two Kukas who disclosed

that on the direction of Guru Ram Singh, Suba Hira Singh, *Jagirdar* of Sadaurah in Saharanpur district (N.W. Province), now in Ambala, approached Maharaja of Jammu to raise Kukas' companies in his State in 1868. Maharaja agreed to Hira Singh's proposal and asked him to command these companies but under the subordination of Colonel Hukama Singh. Suba Hira Singh returned to Bhaini Sahib and obtained Namdhari Guru Ram Singh's permission to take 175 Kukas with him at once to Jammu. However, when Maharaja got the news of massacre of butchers, he immediately disbanded these companies.[72]

The Inspector General of Punjab Police was seized of this development and gave a warning to the government. [73]

Another development which disturbed the British government was a rapport between the Namdhari Guru and Jung Bahadur, the Rana of Nepal. It is said that latter was much impressed by the growing popularity of Kukaism in Punjab. Contacts of the Nepali ruler with Maharaja Ranjit Singh were old in terms of state employment. During this tenure, Jung Bahadur wanted to explore the possibility of job avenues in Punjab. Similarly, sixteen Kukas tried to get jobs in the army of Nepal. Important among these aspirants were Hari Singh, Kirpal Singh, Bishan Singh, Nihal Singh and Assa Singh who were quite well-known in the official circles of Nepal. It was due to the contacts of these Kukas that Rana Jung Bahadur wanted to see Namdhari Guru. In the police report it was stated that the Maharana of Nepal wrote a letter to Namdhari Guru Ram Singh asking him to send his men to the Nepal regiments. In response, the Namdhari Guru replied that he would not dispatch any Kuka nor would he come himself to see him, but he would send presents to the Maharana. In 1870-71, a Kuka envoy along with a couple of Punjabi buffaloes and mules visited Nepal and held several rounds of conversation with Jung Bahadur. Most probably, the Kuka envoy wanted to explore the possibility of job avenues for the Namdhari Sikhs in the Nepali army. In return the Maharaja also sent valuable presents for the Namdhari Guru comprising of five hundred rupees in cash, one gold necklace, one *doshala*, one horse and two *khukhris*.

The British expressed their resentment to the Nepal ruler and deputed their agents to find out the exact nature of Kukas' relations with the Nepal ruler. Through their agent at Kathmandu, the British came to know about the huge strength (three lacs) of Namdhari followers in Punjab. At the same time, the British realised that Rana was not showing undue encouragement to the Kukas who were just seeking jobs in the Nepali army. Since no foreigner could be enlisted in this army, therefore, there was no question of recruiting

Kukas. As we shall note later, the Rana was trying to build-up diplomatic pressure on the British in the context of Indo-Chinese relations. Like the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir, the Rana also dismissed the Kukas in the wake of Kukas' attack on the Malerkotla State. These Kukas were just employed for imparting military training to the Gurkhas. [74]

These developments clearly show the political overtones of the Namdhari Guru's mission. These overtones were more perceptible in his longing for a Russian attack on the British Raj. The Namdhari Guru wrote a number of letters from Burma to his followers enquiring about the impending attack by Russia. However, we have only a solitary reference of Bishen Singh, who had been sent to Russia and that he had entered the Russian service at the desire of Namdhari Guru Ram Singh.

Notes and References

1. Jaswant Singh Jass, *Baba Ram Singh Namdhari*, Kasturi Lal and Sons, Amritsar, 1962, p 2.
2. Harbans Singh (Ed.), *The Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. I, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1995, p 265.
3. *Op. Cit*, p 265.
4. *Namdhari Sikhs: A Brief Account (As Narrated by Giani Gian Singh)*, (English Version by Dr Harbhajan Singh), Manager *Satjug*, Sri Jiwan Nagar, Sirsa, 2000, pp 48-49.
5. Harbans Singh, *The Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol.III, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1997, p 514.
6. Cited in *Gazetteer of Ludhiana district*, 1888-1889, Punjab Government, Lahore, pp 66-67.
7. Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, Oxford India Paperbacks, 2001, p 154.
8. *Op.cit.*, p 160.
9. *Op.cit.*, p 162.
10. For detail, see, *A Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of Punjab and North-West Frontier Province* (Ed. H.A. Rose), Vol. I, Low Price Publications, Delhi, 1999 (first published in 1919), pp 710-716: other Sikh shrines where composite beliefs and practices and fairs were performed were Chola Sahib and Tahli Sahib in Dera Baba Nanak; Achal Sahib, Batala, Gurusar, Khosa Kotla, Zeera Tehsil, Firozepur, temple attached to Sri Darbar Sahib were Shahid Ganj, Tibbi Sahib, Mukh-

Manjan Sahib and Tambu Sahib. The Shahid Ganj is where Guru Gobind Singh's followers were slain and burnt. The Tibbi Sahib is where he fought the enemy. This sanctuary lies a mile to the west of the Darbar Sahib. From it the Guru went to the west of the Tibbi Sahib, is another Gurdwara which is called the Mukh-Manjan Sahib, because the Guru cleaned his teeth there.

11. Cited by M.M. Ahluwalia, *Kukas*, Allied Publishers, New Delhi, 1965, pp 45-46.
12. Sant Santokh Singh Bahowal, *Satguru Bilas*, (Ed. Jaswinder Singh) Pt. I, Namdhari Darbar Bhaini Sahib. Ludhiana, 2002, pp 152-153.
13. Ganda Singh, pp 16-18.
14. Cited in *Kukas*, (M.M. Ahluwalia), Allied Publishers, New Delhi, 1965, pp 47-48.
15. *Namdhari Sikhs: A Brief Account (As Narrated by Giani Gian Singh)*, pp 56-57.
16. "Chandi di Var (the Ballad of goddess Chandi) or, to give it its exact title, *Var Sri Bhagauti Ji Ki*, by Guru Gobind Singh and included in the *Dasam Granth*, is the story of the titantic contest between Chandi and other gods on the one hand and the demons on the other. The poem allegorises the eternal conflict between good and evil. The source of the legend is "Devi mahatmya." A section of the *Markandeya-purana*, and the narrative follows, in the main, the classical detail though the dominant interest lies in the character of Chandi which, through the creative genius of the poet, attains reality and firmness belying its mythical origin. The Var, in Punjabi, is one of the trilogy of poems about Chandi in the *Dasam Granth*, the other two being in Braj": *The Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*. (Ed. Harbans Singh), Vol.1, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1995, p 434.
17. For details of this ceremony, see, M.M. Ahluwalia, pp 48-49.
18. *Op.cit.*, p 48.
19. "Kirtan; the laudatory recital, verbal and literary of the name and qualities of a person. Its technical meaning consists in the repeated utterance of name. Of the nine modes of *bhakti* or devotion, *Kirtan* is the second. In a still more technical sense it means a variety of devotional music used in singing the name or praise of the lord": *A Glossary of Indian Religious Terms and Concepts*. (Narendra Nath Bhattacharya), Manohar, Delhi, 1999, pp 85-86.
20. For detail, see, Pishaura Singh, *The Guru Granth Sahib*, O.U.P., 2000, pp 269-270; Rattan Singh Jaggi, *Guru Granth Vishavkosh*, Pt. L., Punjabi University, Patiala, 2002, pp 340-42.
21. Cited in *Gaatha Swatantrata Sangram Di*, (Dalip Singh Namdhari), Namdhari Darbar, Bhaini Sahib, 2002, pp 27-28.
22. Harbans Singh, *The Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. I, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1995, pp 563-64.

23. For detail, see, *Mahan Noor: Sri Satguru Partap Singh Ji*, Navyug Publishers, Delhi, 1999, pp 197-238; Jaswant Singh Jass, p 17.
24. Dalip Singh Namdhari, pp 111-112.
25. Atma Singh Sankhatrvi; *Sri Nanak Raj Namdhari Darbar*, Bhaini Sahib, 1997, pp 253-254.
26. Santokh Singh Bahowal, pp 167-195.
27. Nidhan Singh Alam, *Jug Paltaoo Satguru*, Namdhari Darbar, 2006, pp 46-47; Santokh Singh Bahowal, pp 225-226.
28. Harbans Singh, *The Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*. Vol. III, p 136.
29. *Namdhari Sikhs: A Brief Account (As Narrated by Giani Gian Singh)*, pp 68-71.
30. Fauja Singh, p 118.
31. Jaswant Singh Jass, pp 19-20.
32. Cited in Kirpal Singh Kasel, *Tavarikh Sant Khalsa*, Pt. I, Arsee Publishers, Delhi, 2006, pp 537-538.
33. 1. Mata Sada Kaur, Satguru Ram Singh's mother; 2. Bibi Jassan, Satguru Singh's wife; 3. Bibi Ram Kaur, wife of Mistari Hari Singh and Satguru Ram Singh's Mami (Aunt); 4. Bibi Khem Kaur, wife of Sant Rann Singh Lambardar of village Siahar; 5. Mai Ind Kaur, wife of Nand Singh, village Handiya; 6. Bibi Karam Kaur, daughter of Dhanna Singh, village Gujjarwal, Ludhiana; 7. Bibi Sahib Kaur, wife of Hukam Singh, Lohgarh (Ludhiana); 8. Bibi Khem Kaur, wife of Narain Singh, village Dittupur; 9. Bibi Man Kaur, wife of Uttam Singh, Siahar Pato; 10. Bibi Daya Kaur, Satguru Ram Singh's daughter; 11. Bibi Bholi, wife of Bhai Khazan Singh (Ludhiana); 12. Bibi Uttam Kaur, Chak Des Raj (Jalandhar); 13. Mai Bhago, Ludhiana; 14. Mai Tabo, Ludhiana; 15. Bibi Bachitar Kaur, wife of Partap Singh, village Khamano (Ludhiana); 16. Bibi Dhan Kaur, wife of Granthi Sant Partap Singh, village Khamano; tabulated by Pritam Singh Kavi in his work *Istarian da Pehla Muktidata*, cited in *Tavarikh Sant Khalsa*, pp 554-555.
34. 1. Bibi Bishan Kaur, daughter of Bhai Joga Singh, village Dhoorkot, district Ferozepur, was married to Bir Singh, son of Bhai Fateh Singh of village, Muthadda, Jalandhar. 2. The daughter of Suba Samund Singh, of village Khotte, was married to a boy belonging to village Thari, district Ferozepur. 3. Prem Kaur, daughter of Bhai Budh Singh, was married in village Dhulete (Jalandhar). 4. Des Kaur, daughter of Sant Fateh Singh, was married in village Nihalewala, district Ferozepur. 5. Sant Kala Singh, of village Daudhar (Ferozepur). 6. Bhai Sundar Singh of village Uboke (Amritsar).
35. M.M. Ahluwalia, p 50.
36. Cited by Doris R. Jakobsh, *Relocating Gender in Sikh History*, Oxford, 2003, p 111.
37. *Ibid.*, also see, M.L. Darling, *The Punjab Peasant and Debt*, South

Asian Books, Delhi, 1978 (reprint), pp 48-59, 132.

38. Jaswinder Singh, *Sri Satguru Ram Singh Ji De Hukamname*, Namdhari Darbar, Bhaini Sahib, Ludhiana, 1998, pp 296-297.
39. *Ibid.*, also see, *Rahitnama* cited by Tara Singh Anjan, pp 65-66.
40. Doris R. Jakobsh, p 110.
41. Jaswinder Singh, p 403.
42. Ganda Singh, *Kukian di Vithia*, Khalsa College, Amritsar, 1944, pp 224, 230.
43. Cited in *Rebels Against the British Rule* (Eds. Nahar Singh, Kirpal Singh), Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, 1995, pp 1-2.
44. *Op.cit.*, p 3.
45. *Op.cit.*, pp 6-7.
46. Nidhan Singh Alam, pp 57-63.
47. For detail, see, Ian Talbort, *Punjab and the Raj*, Manohar, New Delhi, pp 48-65.
48. Nahar Singh, Kirpal Singh, pp 8-9.
49. M.M. Ahluwalia, p 60.
50. Nahar Singh, Kirpal Singh, p 33.
51. Nahar Singh, Kirpal Singh, pp 35-37.
52. Harjot Oberoi, pp 199-200.
53. Nahar Singh, Kirpal Singh, p 49.
54. *Op.cit.*, p 55.
55. *Op.cit.*, p 59.
56. *Op.cit.*, p 59.
57. *Satjug*, 22 Magh 1986 (A.D. 1929), pp 10-40; Jaswant Singh Jass, p 17.
58. Nahar Singh, *Ram Singh and the Kuka Sikhs*, Vol. II, Amrit Book Co., New Delhi, 1956, p 79.
59. Fauja Singh, p 34.
60. Ganda Singh, p 44.
61. *Op.cit.*, p 45.
62. Nahar Singh, Kirpal Singh, p 61.
63. *Op.cit.*, p 67.
64. Nahar Singh, Kirpal Singh, pp 77-78, 80-81; Ganda Singh, pp 46-48.
65. For details, see, Nahar Singh, Kirpal Singh, pp 99-101. It may be pointed out here that Nirmala scholar Giani Gian Singh also corroborated subjective perception of Namdhari followers who perceived their spiritual master as the incarnation (avtar) of Guru Gobind Singh. Similarly, the version of Sau-Sakhis as circulated by the Kukas reiterated Bhai Ram Singh as an avtar.
66. For details, see, Nahar Singh, Kirpal Singh, pp 108-113.
67. Nahar Singh, Kirpal Singh, p 118.

68. Nahar Singh, *Namdhari Itihas*, Ludhiana, n.d., p 95.
69. *Op.cit.*, pp 95-96.
70. *Op.cit.*, pp 97-98.
71. Nahar Singh, Kirpal Singh, pp 132-133.
72. *Op.cit.*, pp 135-136
73. Fauja Singh, p 130.
74. For details, see, Fauja Singh, pp 135-138.

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4

NAMDHARI GURU STRIVING FOR KHALSA RAJ: AN OFFICIAL ASSESSMENT

It was in 1863 that the British bureaucracy and police officials took note of the activities and movements of Namdhari Guru Ram Singh who was addressed as 'Guru' and 'Bhai'. The police reports stated that he was head of a new sect of Sikhs. Both words (guru and bhai) denote the socially and spiritually elevated position of Ram Singh who came from a humble background—*lohar* of a village Bhaini Arayian in mid 19th century. Both words, however, come from Sikh tradition.

> Etymologically the word 'bhai' means brother, but within early Sikh tradition the word was also used as an honorific for the holy men of the Panth. To qualify for this title a person had to demonstrate a capacity to interpret the *Adi-Granth*, communicate the wisdom of the gurus it enshrined and be publicly recognised for his piety. If in addition, he could work miracles, heal the sick and give succour to the distressed, he was sure to occupy a position of considerable reverence and influence within the community.[1]

Affix of *Bhai* to his name shows that the Namdhari Guru had earned this holy status by 1863. More important is the appellation of Guru to his name which 'was often used for those Bedis, Sodhis and Nirmalas who performed the Sikh initiation rites'.[2] Appellation of these words implied that Ram Singh enjoyed an equal status of his contemporaries

i.e. Bedis and Sodhis of Guru lineage. The Namdhari Guru started performing Sikh initiation rites on 12 April 1857 when he formed Sant Khalsa. Although he assumed holy status but his source of inspiration was only Guru Gobind Singh's *Granth*. For him Gobind Singh was the real Guru. By implication, the Namdhari Guru refused to recognise the guruship of his contemporaries Bedis and Sodhis. Rather he called them 'imposters'. Moreover, they had identified themselves with the *Raj* and its culture after the Uprising of 1857. Similarly, he held the Khalsa itself responsible for the loss of Khalsa Raj. Assuming the status of holy man, he visualised that the Sant Khalsa would supplant the *malechh* Khalsa and ultimately restore Khalsa Raj. His *Suba* system was an assertion of his temporal authority, notionally.

His fame had spread rapidly and by 1863 he had been able to recruit as many as 40,000 disciples and by 1866, the number of these disciples multiplied to 60,000.[3] T.A.O. Cornnor, Officiating District Superintendent of Police, Hoshiarpur prepared the list of 50 chiefs of Kuka sect in 1871. Among these chiefs were several *subas* who were actually *Sardars* and *Jagirdars*. There was one female *suba*. Five *subas* served the Sikh army of Lahore and five *subas* served the British army and either they themselves resigned or were dismissed from service by the British. Remarks appended to these *subas* by the British officials are important to betray their 'links' with the mutiny of 1857. Lakha Singh, son of Rur Singh was Jat resident of Chhut Bullor, Patiala and sepoy in the 2nd Police Battalion (Sherdal) in which he was a drill instructor. Deputy Superintendent described him as 'of a turbulent and fanatical disposition, capable of creating a disturbance.' He was said to have been recently imprisoned in Patiala. Bhagwan Singh, son of Sukhoo Ram, was resident of Banga, Nawan Shahar district. He served for five years in second Cavalry under Major Brown. He was Naib Risaldar in Hudson's Horse during the Mutiny. He resigned in 1860. Maluk Singh was Jat and resident of

Bholeval Mukatsar of district Ferozepur. He also served in same Regiment during 1857-58. Prem Singh, son of Khushal Singh, was Jat and resident of village Bursalpur, district Ludhiana. Dismissal by the British authorities or resignation by themselves show that these personnel were not loyal to the government. Rather they were more loyal to the Namdhari Guru who appointed them as *subas*. (There is further need to enquire into the causes and circumstances under which they left their jobs.) There were several *subas* and activists who, in the official circles, were more dangerous. Among them was Sardar Mangal Singh of Dholpur, Patiala state. It is said that the Raja of Patiala offered him many inducements to leave the sect (Kuka) but he refused. He was turned out of Patiala and stayed with Namdhari Guru Ram Singh. Besides, some of these *subas* were described as fiercely fanatical and capable of creating disturbances.[4]

Similarly, more links between the Uprising of 1857 and Kuka movement are perceptible when we note that there were several former 'sepoys' or personnel who got themselves recruited in the Kuka regiment raised in Jammu and Kashmir. In 1870, as noted earlier, Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir raised two Kuka companies, comprising two hundred men, with the intention of making them the nucleus of a regular Kuka regiment, exactly in the same way as he had regular regiments of Dogras. The District Superintendent of Police, Gujranwala gave a list of 33 members of companies of Kuka regiment of Jammu and Kashmir State. Among these 33 Kuka soldiers, there were several Kuka Sikhs who were in the British police and army or in some civil departments or served the Lahore *Darbar*. Prem Singh was sepoy of Bhai Maharaj Singh; Bahadur Singh was formerly sepoy in a Native Infantry Regiment; Shoun Singh was formerly a sergeant in Ferozepur; Lal Singh was also formerly a sepoy in a Native Infantry Regiment. Moreover, Adjutant Tara Singh of Kuka regiment was son

of Chatar Singh and nephew of the Late Colonel Mihan Singh, of the Sikh service and at one time Governor of Kashmir. Under the British rule, Tara Singh was in the 7th Police Battalion (Amritsar Regiment) and was dismissed by the British from the service in 1858 for very suspicious conduct during the mutiny.[5]

Namdhari Guru Ram Singh and his followers carried on the 'insurgent' tradition of Bhai Maharaj Singh (d. 1856), a saintly person turned revolutionary who led an anti-British movement in Punjab after the first Anglo-Sikh War. Maharaj Singh's revolutionary career started with the 'Prema Conspiracy Case' involving him in a plot to murder the British Resident, Henry Lawrence, and other pro-British officers of the Lahore *Darbar*. When the British restricted his movements, he went underground. The government confiscated his property at Amritsar and announced a reward for his arrest. He supported the rebellion of Diwan Mul Raj in June 1848 with 400 horsemen. He fought against the British in the battles of Ram Nagar, Chellianvala and Gujarat. After the annexation of Lahore Kingdom, he resolved to carry on the fight single handedly. He escaped to Jammu and made Dev Batala his secret headquarters in December 1849. Later on, he went to Hoshiarpur and visited the Sikh regiment (British) to enlist their support. He also developed rapport with the Sikh soldiers in Jalandhar cantonment. It may be pointed out here that the Sikh sepoys stationed in this cantonment rebelled along with the Hindustani sepoys against the British during 1857. The impact of persuasions of Bhai Maharaj Singh on these sepoys cannot be overruled. During his struggle, Bhai Maharaj Singh circulated the Sau-Sakhis in which, he assured the people that Khalsa would regain sovereignty in Punjab. It may be pointed out here that these Sakhis were circulated in 1848 and during the Uprising of 1857. Bhai Maharaj Singh carried on his head a price of 10,000 rupees. He was arrested on 28 December 1849 at Adampur (Jalandhar) and deported

him to Singapore where, after several years of solitary confinement, he died on 5 July 1856. He had gone blind before the end came.[6] Namdhari Guru Ram Singh and his followers held Bhai Maharaj Singh in great esteem in the context of anti-British struggle.

The British took keen interest to know the motives of the Namdhari Guru for the reasons that he was moving with his *jatha* (band) from one place to another. They deputed secret agents for eliciting information about his activities and found that there were some collective activities going on at his Dera Bhaini Sahib. One of the agents was Mani Ram, a Brahmin of Jalandhar who reported that

> Ram Singh is gifted with magical power, which sends people into fits.... In common with all other Sikhs, doubtless, Ram Singh wishes their rule back but he does not preach this; considers himself unquestionably a Prophet and believes his preaching to be entirely of a religious nature.[7]

But the report of Ganda Singh, another agent, gave astonishing information about the political ambition of the Namdhari Guru. He claimed that he procured two letters from a close confidant of the Namdhari Guru. These letters, as noted earlier, stated the political objectives of the Namdhari Guru. However, these two letters cannot be dismissed in terms of a work of polluted mind. It could be a construct of Ganda Singh's imagination but these letters articulated popular Sikh sentiments. In fact, neither the British officials nor our contemporary scholars could comprehend these sentiments expressed in right perspective. The comprehension of these sentiments is related to the fact that Sakhi literature which was in circulation immediately after the annexation of Khalsa Raj expressed the nostalgia of that *Raj*. It was a powerful sentiment prevalent among the Khalsa veterans like Bhai Maharaj Singh, Sahib Singh Bedi and Sikh Sardars. As noted in the first chapter, Sahib

Singh Bedi and Sikh veterans were forced to accept the British Raj. The notable families of Attariwala, Majithia, Ahluwalia and Ramgarhia had become loyalist to the British Raj. Bhai Maharaj Singh who launched a movement for the restoration of the Khalsa Raj was no more active in Punjab. If the nostalgic sentiment of the Khalsa Raj could be ascribed to any unblemished personality it was only the Namdhari Guru. Ganda Singh was unwittingly articulating such sentiments using the name of Namdhari Guru.

In fact, the Sakhi literature, which was resurrected both by the Sikh veterans and Namdhari Guru Ram Singh himself during and after the Uprising of 1857, reflected unfulfilled desire of the Khalsa of the 18th century to establish its hegemony over the Gangetic plains. Subsequently, Maharaja Ranjit Singh also made an effort to establish his hegemony over the Malwa region. But the efforts were intervened by the British. When the Uprising of 1857 broke out, the Khalsa veterans circulated the Sakhis with the above said motive. Governor General Canning confirmed the rumours of the Sikh uprising in 1857. Quoting a prophecy, he said "The imperial city of the Mughals would some day be given up to plunder of the Khalsa." K.C. Yadav rightly points out that 'it was not plunder but the rule of the Khalsa'. After Bhai Maharaj Singh, it was Namdhari Guru Ram Singh and his followers who articulated the unfulfilled desire of the Khalsa to recover its lost kingdom. Moreover, the Sau Sakhis presented an alternative structure to the British Raj. For the Kukas, the British Raj promoted communal hatred when it allowed cow-slaughter which hurt the religious sentiments of the Hindus and Sikhs alike. The hawkers were allowed to sold beef in the thickly populated areas of the Hindus and Sikhs. Moreover, the Sakhi literature invoked the concept of *shaheed* to rekindle the spirit of sacrifice among the Khalsa (Sant). The concept of a *shaheed* in Sakhi literature imagined a mythical character who enjoyed a direct rapport with God and exercised supernatural powers. In the mid

19th century, the people obeyed and worshipped that character. However, in the Sikh tradition such character was Baba Deep Singh. The circulation of the Sakhi literature was meant for the Sant Khalsa who was expected to emulate the supernatural character of *shaheed* and made a triumph over its enemy.[8] Faith of the Khalsa in its ultimate victory posed a threat to the established authority (British).

The incident of Tharajwala in February 1869 showed that the rejuvenated Sant Khalsa was visualising its victory over the British. The forty-four Kuka Sikhs sold of their land holdings as well as households and came to stay at Bhaini Sahib headquarters. After some time, they started rallying around Bhai Mastan Singh who was so excited with the idea of restoring the Khalsa rule. Similarly, the Namdhari Guru's efforts to build up political links with the native rulers of neighbouring states were also directed towards that goal. He thought that the Kuka Sikhs could be given some military training. He made an attempt to get a Kuka regiment set up in the State of Jammu and Kashmir. His plan did succeed when the Maharaja of that state raised a Kuka regiment. The Namdhari Guru also thought of taking advantage of strained relations between the ruler of Nepal and the British. However, both of his plans were terminated by the incident of 1871-72.

The British officials perceived these activities in terms of a rebellion which could spread in Punjab. This threat was not notional in the wake of arrangements for the dak-system, military training and political contacts with the native rulers. "Moreover, by the year 1871, the Namdhari Sikhs had put up their activity centres at Gwalior, Peshawar, Kabul, Nepal, Bhutan and Kashmir. They also established rapport with their respective rulers. For instance, in Nepal, the Namdhari representatives met Nand Ram, a Punjabi Rajput, who had played a conspicuous role during the Mutiny of 1857, and was thus given the name of General by his comrades. In the year 1871, the British Government sent its secret agent, Raja

Shivraj Singh of Kashipur to Nepal to find out the whereabouts of the Indian rebels residing in Nepal. On his return to India, Raja Sahib reported that he had met and talked to Kirpal Singh Kuka, and had also met the younger brother of Tantiya Tope, but he could not find any trace about Nana Sahib and Kishan Singh Kuka."[9]

The British, in the meantime, felt alarmed at the secret activities of the Namdhari Sikhs. The two senior most officers of the Punjab Government were ordered to prepare detailed reports regarding the Namdhari organisation, its aims and activities. Macnabb, in his long report dated 4 November 1871, reached to the following conclusions:

> Whatever may have been the intentions of the leaders of the sect at the beginning, its tendency is distinctly political. Many men of position are joining the sect. It seems necessary, for the internal safety and tranquility of the country, that Guru Ram Singh be deported to some place, where he cannot be visited by his worshippers. I am strongly of the opinion that the safest thing to do with Guru Ram Singh is to transport him to the Andamans...if the Government prefer to act against him directly under Act III of 1818. It should be done at once.[10]

Lieutenant Colonel G. McAndrew in his memorandum dated 20 November 1871 wrote that

> it appears to me to be a case in which Government may fairly act without the usual course of elaborate legal procedure and as a matter of general expediency and good government, send Guru Ram Singh out of the country. He and his followers have now given most undoubted signs of a disposition to set all law and order at defiance.[11]

Such reports set a wave of fear and indignation in the minds of the British officers against the Kukas. They read the signs of a general rebellion in the country, organised and headed by the Namdhari Guru and his followers. Some of

them apprehended the shadows of 1857 in the programmes and activities of the Kuka sect. Nearly all of them were on the watch to find some opportunity to annihilate and crush this sect.

It is a well known fact that the outbreak of the Uprising of 1857 was started by the Hindustani sepoys who were offended by the British. The British orders which forbade the wearing of caste-marks, beards, or turbans were looked upon by them as infringements of their religious rights. One of the informers of police surveillance informed Captain Millar, Cantonment Magistrate, Jalandhar on 18 June 1863 that the Namdhari Guru knew 'that cartridges, prepared in the same way as in 1857, were again about to be distributed. But ruthless suppression of the Uprising of 1857 made the strategy and tactics employed by the Hindustani rebels redundant. The only workable strategy and tactics in Punjab were arousing emotional and sentimental appeals to the Sikhs and Hindus. Inadvertently, the British provided an opportunity to Namdhari Guru Ram Singh. The British policy of lifting prohibition of cow-killing offended the religious sentiments of the Sikhs and Hindus. As early as 1849, the Board of Administration lifted this prohibition. This order encouraged the Muslims to practice cow-killing. The Board of Administration issued the following bye-laws: (a) cows will be slaughtered at a particular place outside the town, (b) no shop will be opened in the town for the open sale of beef.

The Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar allowed the opening of slaughter house outside the city in accordance with the above bye-laws. The opening of a cow-slaughter house at Amritsar gave a signal for opening of many more such slaughter houses in different towns throughout Punjab. Since the starting of a slaughter house at Amritsar, the Muslim butchers started the sale of beef openly in the streets of the city. On 7 May 1856, a culprit involved in such a crime was produced before F. Cooper, Deputy Commissioner of

Amritsar. The cases of sale of beef in the streets populated by the Hindus and Sikhs were subsequently reported. Consequently, the relations between Hindus and Sikhs on the one side and Muslims on the other side became tense. By the year 1871, the tension gave way to communal quarrels, open fights and riots. The Divisional Commissioner had to intervene and tried to pacify the Hindus and the Sikhs of the city who were offended over cow-killing. Meanwhile, the Muslims floated a rumour that four more shops will be opened in the city for the sale of beef and that one of these will be adjacent to the complex of the Golden Temple. When a meat shop was opened, the Hindus and the Sikhs were emotionally disturbed to see that kites and crows dropping bones in the holy tank or nearby places. One of such bones was picked up by Bhai Deva Singh, who placed it before the sacred scripture in the Golden Temple on 24 April 1871. Bhai Deva Singh's intention was to provoke the Sikhs to stop this obnoxious thing. Bhai Deva Singh was arrested by Sardar Bahadur Mangal Singh Ramgarhia; the Custodian Manager of Golden Temple. He was sentenced to three years rigorous imprisonment and one month's solitary confinement.

Bhai Deva Singh's daring act shows the impact of Namdhari Guru's propagation of the Sikh tradition of protecting the poor and helpless people. As noted in the beginning that during his service in the regiment of Prince Nau Nihal Singh, the Namdhari Guru did not come across any incident of offending the sentiments of the Hindus and Sikhs. Moreover, the Namdhari Guru was aware of the fact that Maharaja Ranjit Singh had instructed Shah Shuja-ul Mulak and the British that whenever their forces crossed his kingdom, no cow-slaughter would take place. But after the annexation of Kingdom of Lahore, the British deliberately violated the established custom of not killing the cow. The Namdhari Guru was quite upset over the opening of slaughter house near Chowk Ghanta Ghar, Darbar Sahib.[12] According to Nidhan Singh Alam, the

Namdhari Guru formed a *jatha* of ten Namdhari zealots for removing this slaughter house. The *jatha* moved towards Amritsar and was pained to see the slaughter house near Lahori Darwaza. However, when they came across another slaughter house near Darbar Sahib, they lost control over their sentiments and made up their mind to eliminate Muslim butchers. They worked out a scheme in the house of Carpenter Lehna Singh; performed *havan* and resolved to stop cow-killing in the holy city of Amritsar.[13] On the night of 14 June, about eight Namdhari Sikhs attacked the butchers inside the slaughter house. Three butchers were killed on the spot and three were badly wounded. The local police officer arrested twelve Hindu and Sikh inhabitants of the city for these murders and filed a suit against them in the court. The police tortured them to confess their crime. The accused were committed to sessions by the Deputy Commissioner. When the Namdhari Guru came to know that innocents were going to be punished, he ordered the culprits (Namdhari Sikhs) to present themselves before the Magistrate and confess their crime. On their own confession, four Namdhari Sikhs were hanged on 15 September 1871. The Namdhari Guru's intervention asking his followers to confess their crime in this incident speaks of his ethical commitment. His intervention also gave a message to the rest of his followers that if they wished to carry on their righteous struggle they should be prepared to lay down their lives.

Similar murders of butchers by the Namdhari Sikhs took place at Raikot in the Ludhiana district, on 15 July 1871. Of these butchers, 4 were killed on the spot and 7 badly injured. In this case, 7 accused, 5 belonging to Nabha State and 2 to Patiala State, were arrested with the help of the Maharaja of Patiala and Nabha. They were produced before a Magistrate at village Bassian. An effort was made by the police to implicate and involve 'Guru Ram Singh as an instigator and abettor. He was summoned to appear before

the Magistrate at Bassian which he did. On 5 August 1871, three of them were hanged at Raikot in the presence of a large gathering. The remaining two accused, Giani Rattan Singh and Rattan Singh of Naiwala involved in this case, were later on hanged at Ludhiana outside the jail premises on 26 November 1871.[14]

From the incidents of Amritsar and Raikot, the government came to the conclusion 'that these murders had been deliberately and repeatedly planned'. The British bureaucracy had made up its mind to execute Namdhari Guru Ram Singh. However, it was also aware of the legal lacuna i.e. it was impossible to obtain any evidence as would warrant the Namdhari Guru's prosecution in a criminal court. At the same time, J W Macnabb, Officiating Commissioner, Ambala Division and Lieutenant Colonel, G. McAndrew, Deputy Inspector General of Police, Ambala Circle, strongly believed that the Namdhari Guru should be exiled because the Kuka movement had assumed political character and the Namdhari Guru was no longer a saintly *fakir* and argued that the revival of the Khalsa (Sant) by the Namdhari Guru was antagonistic to the British power. He suggested to the government that the activities of the Namdhari Guru should be taken as political but not of any legal concern. However, Lieutenant Governor was yet reluctant to take the extreme step of deportation. He re-imposed restrictions on the movements of the Namdhari Guru and holding of fairs by the Kuka Sikhs.

Meanwhile, imprisonments and hangings did not make the Kuka zealots to be subservient to the British Raj. Knowing the implications of an armed attack on the Muslim State, the Namdhari Guru tried his best to persuade his Kuka zealots not to proceed to Malerkotla. When he failed to stop them, he informed Police Inspector Sarfraz Khan that Lehna Singh and Hira Singh and their associates were not under his control. He also sent Suba Lakha Singh to Police Station Sahnewal (Ludhiana) for informing the authorities about the

movements of the Kuka zealots. When the police officials did not pay due attention, Suba Lakha Singh passed on this information to the Police Superintendent, Ludhiana. It seems that the Namdhari Guru's intention was to avoid premature confrontation. Most probably, he was aware of the legal trap in which he and his followers could be hooked up. However, the Kuka zealots refused to listen to their Guru's persuasions.

They attacked the obscure Malodh Fort in Ludhiana district on 13 January 1872, and then with their increased strength, they tried to enter the town of Malerkotla. They contemplated that they could overpower Malodh estate and Malerkotla; secure arms and horses. Nevertheless, they could not anticipate the resistance from Malodh Fort of Sardar Badan Singh. In the fighting, they suffered losses; two killed and four wounded but were able to get three swords, one double-barallel gun, two horses and one mare. Delay in attacking Malerkotla gave the state time to defend itself. In the fighting that ensued between Kukas (125 in number) and state forces both suffered several casualties.

Having failed in their objective, these Kukas retreated into Patiala territory. Sixty-eight of them including two women were rounded up at the village Rur. Meanwhile, L. Cowan, Officiating Deputy Commissioner of Ludhiana, reached Malerkotla and when the prisoners arrived over there he proceeded to blow forty-nine of them away from guns but without trial.[15] This he did inspite of earlier caution which he had received from T.D. Forsyth, Commissioner of Ambala Division. He also received the second letter from Forsyth but did not bother to restrain himself. In that letter, Forsyth explicitly ordered Cowan to follow legal course. In fact, Cowan was predetermined to execute the Kukas. In his letter to the Commissioner of Ambala Division dated 17 January 1872, he said

> I am in hourly expectation of the arrival of the prisoners from Rur. I propose to execute at once all who were engaged in the attacks on Malodh and Kotla. I am sensible

> of the great responsibility. I incur in exercising an authority which is not vested in me, but the case is an exceptional one. These men are not ordinary criminals. They are rebels having their immediate object the acquisition of plunder (sic), and ultimately subversion of order. It is certain that, had their first attempt been crowned with success, had they succeeded in arming themselves and providing themselves with horses and treasure they would have been joined by all the abandoned characters in the country; and their extinction would not have been affected without much trouble. By the timely preparation at Kotla State the first efforts of the Kuka Sikhs were defeated, and by the active exertion of the Patiala officials, this miserable attempt at rebellion has been stamped out, but others of their stamp must be deterred (sic) from following so bad an example and that the warning should be effectual, it must be prompt and terrible. I have every confidence that the Government of Punjab will approve of the immediate execution of those prisoners who have been taken red-handed.[16]

With this revengeful spirit, Cowan blew up the last batch of the Kuka prisoners. Among his victims was a child who attacked him ferociously but was cut down to pieces at the spot. The child was persuaded by Cowan to be pliable to the British but he refused to give up his religious cause. Forsyth himself made a mockery of the British law when he approved Cowan's report. In his report, he justified his action of summary trial.

The official justification of the summary execution of the Kuka Sikhs is worth noting for several reasons. First and foremost is that it shows the continuity of ruthlessness of the local British civil and police officials since 1857. They found parallels between the 'Mutiny' of 1857 and the insurgency of the Kuka Sikhs. The summary execution of the Kuka Sikhs was 'warranted by a former precedent when

a large number of rebels were thus disposed of in 1857'. Moreover, these officials were backed up by their seniors. The barbaric action of Cowan was not only approved but also admired by T.D. Forsyth, Commissioner of Ambala Division. The British officials saw bigger danger in the traditional strategy of the Namdhari Guru and his followers. The issue of cow-killing could mobilise the sympathies of Hindus and Sikhs in support of the Kuka Sikhs. L.H. Griffen, Officiating Secretary to the Government of Punjab wrote that the Lieutenant Governor felt that

> the real danger of that creed in the form, which it has assumed consists in this, that it appeals strongly to the sympathies of large sections of the Native Community outside the circle of avowed Kukas (sic). The denunciation of kine-killing and even the active measures taken against butchers at Raikot and Amritsar, have enlisted to a certain extent the sympathies of even well-disposed Hindus while the predictions of a restoration of the Khalsa Raj made an appeal to the sympathies of all Sikhs who have not forgotten the traditions of the past. There is evidence, no doubt, to show that no general coalition exists at present between the orthodox Sikhs and the Kukas; but there is also evidence to show that the hostile feelings between these sects is less strong than before, in the recent large accession to the number of the Kukas from the ranks of the Sikhs, and in fact that while a few years ago, no men of good family and position had joined the new creed; there is now a considerable number of petty Sardars and men of family among its avowed adherents.
>
> There is no evidence further to show with what precise intention, or with what success Kuka emissaries have visited distant parts of India or States, on its northern border; but it may be safely presumed that the intention was political and not religious, from the open assertions of the Kukas, that they expected aid from Nepal and Kashmir, that the troops of the cis-Sutlej states would join

them in the event of a rising and that the ranks of the British army contained numerous members of their creed.[17]

The slavish justification of Cowan's barbarity came from the Sikh Sardars. They addressed in Urdu to Lieutenant Governor of Punjab in the Darbar held at Amritsar in March and Governor of Punjab telegraphed to Home Secretary, Calcutta on 22 March 1872. The text of this memorandum was as follows:

> We, the undersigned Sikhs of all classes of Amritsar, unanimously submit that we have no connection or sympathy whatever with the Kuka sect, which has recently become notorious. On the contrary we greatly differ from them on most religious principles. We are happy that the government has adopted most appropriate and excellent measures for controlling this wicked and misguided sect, especially as the measures in question are calculated to deter ill-disposed people from committing mischief in future, and in the event of any member of this depraved sect committing crime to prevent suspicion falling on people of other sects, as happened in the case of the murder of the butchers at Amritsar. Moreover, the Kukas do not differ from us in religious principles only, but they may be said to be our mortal enemies. Since by their misconduct and evil designs, they injured our honour in the estimation of the government, and well-high levelled with the dust, the services performed in 1857, through which we were regarded as well-wishers and loyal subjects by the government. But as the proverb says, "Truth is invulnerable", the government has found out that we had no share in the proceedings of the sect. And regarding the sect, as our enemies, we are thankful to the government for the measures which have been adopted whereby the desires of our hearts have been fulfilled.[18]

However, the reaction of contemporary newspapers in India was not only qualitatively different from the landed Sikh gentry and priests but also civilised in terms of censuring the ruthlessness of the local officials involved in the incident. For instance, *The Hindu Patriot* in its issue on 29 January 1872 began with a note of justification in terms of "stability of British power in the East to unite and put down with a strong hand any overt act of disaffection, leaving to calmer moments the consideration of the best means of allaying the discontent which may have seized the popular mind. The Kuka outbreak, which is the latest manifestation of this discontent, shows that the volcano in the Punjab is in a state of ferment."[19] But the newspaper censured the acts of the British officials when it said that

> we are aware that in dealing with the Kukas we are dealing with a fanatical sect, but we cannot afford to ourselves become savages. Strange to say not a voice has been raised or a line written, as far as we have seen, against this wholesale military execution. Surely there must be some error as to forty-nine men shot down at once, after the suppression of the rebellion. If not then we say that Mr Cowan will be called upon the public opinion to give some plain and straightforward account of the matter, and why he was present at the time of execution.

Briefly speaking, the blowing up of Kuka Sikhs with guns was not only an arbitrary act against the established legal procedure but also 'repugnant to humanity, and a punishment unfit to be inflicted by civilised men'. The Government of India further conceded that it 'cannot admit that any necessity existed in the present case'. Cowan's manner was so unusual and savage'. All who have been unfortunate enough to witness such an execution know that a more horrible and revolting spectacle can hardly be conceived. Cowan was dismissed from the service and Forsyth was transferred to Oudh as Commissioner.

Kuka's attack on butchers and then on Muslim principality was not merely the culmination of their emotional outburst. It was the result of their struggle for social order in which their religious susceptibilities could be honoured. One of the major contributions of Maharaja Ranjit Singh was that he reduced the religious antagonism among the Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs and tried to integrate them with his state. Whereas the British sharpened the communal identities by way of encouraging and patronising the Muslim and Sikh leaders to establish their respective communal organisations and pursue the programme of constructing religious and cultural identities in the last quarter of the 19th century in Punjab. The legal structure of the British Raj, though recognised customs as the laws, yet played up with religious susceptibilities. The cow-killing and selling of beef and conversion remained contentious issues throughout the period under *Raj*.

Since there were inherent cultural contradictions between the Sant Khalsa and the British the former was bound to fight against the latter. The *subas* and the *Mastana Dal* played a significant role in this struggle. Although the Namdhari Guru denied his involvement in the violent activities of his followers lest his concurrence justified ruthlessness and barbarity of the British officials yet it was he who taught his followers to carry on moral obligations of the Khalsa to protect helpless people. Moreover, it was he who reiterated the relevance of cow in the agrarian economy. The diminishing livestock of cows could result into a crisis. The Namdhari Guru received the news of blowing up of Kuka Sikhs at village with fortitude. Paying tribute to their sacrifices he said that there were two alternatives that the Kuka Sikhs could follow: either surrender or go ahead and lay down their lives as the heroes do that.[20] However, the Namdhari Guru was perturbed over the attitude of the Sikh Sardars, and custodians of Sikh historical Gurdwaras to the time-honoured customs of the

Sikhs and Hindus. Instead of protesting against the British policy of compromising their customs and traditions they called Kuka sect a wicked sect and appreciated the government for its excesses committed against the Kuka Sikhs.

Deportation of the Namdhari Guru and his close confidants was the continuity of State-repression. Immediate target of the British police was the headquarters of the Namdhari Sikhs. Its cleansing, the officials thought, would demoralise the Kuka Sikhs.

> Hardly had the sun risen on the 18 morning when Lieutenant Colonel Baillie, as the head of a police party and 25 military sowars, reached Bhaini Sahib. Immediately, a cordon was thrown around the Gurdwaras. All the inmates (about 190 people) were turned out and guarded at a point outside the village, while the entire place was subjected to the rigours of a merciless search. The fruits of the whole ransacking operation were 36 safajangs or takuas (long-handled axes), 6 gandasas (choppers), 2 khukharis, lathis and quoits (number not given), some papers (nothing important), 1500 rupees, some gold and silver ornaments (value not stated) and some precious clothes. The money, ornaments and embroidered clothes were straightway locked in sealed box and sent off to Ludhiana to be deposited there in the state treasury, while Baba Ram Singh's clothes of everyday use were ordered to be placed in the custody of the Sadar Office of Ludhiana. All other articles were forfeited by the Government.[21]

The police also rounded up the people who were staying at the *dera*. After inquiring about their antecedents 19 out of 190 were allowed to stay at the *dera*. Prominent among them were Baba Jassa Singh (Namdhari Guru Ram Singh's father), Budh Singh (Guru's younger brother and successor, subsequently known as Namdhari Guru Hari Singh), Bibi Nandan (daughter of Namdhari Guru Ram

Singh) and her children, and Waryam Singh, Manager of the shop at Bhaini. Makhan Singh, a personal attendant of Namdhari Guru Ram Singh and eleven other people who looked after the cattle, 82 in number. Gurdwara Bhaini Sahib was locked up indefinitely. No ceremony was allowed to be performed. Near about 172 people were forced to move towards Ludhiana under the heavy police guard. The old men, women and the children suffered a lot as there was no arrangement of food and water. When they reached to Ludhiana, they were totally exhausted. Out of these people, 122 were released on the condition that they would go back to their respective villages. Rest of the 50 people were asked to furnish the security. Above all, a permanent police post was established. One inspector and twenty constables were put on duty. The main objective was to keep a vigilant eye on the Kuka Sikhs of nearby villages. Regular reports about the activities on the movements of the people at the *dera* were to be sent to the higher authorities (the police post was lifted in 1922). From Rangoon, the Namdhari Guru enquired whether the search was conducted by *Gora* (white man) or black man (implying Indian). He also enquired about the attitude of the *Lambardars* towards the *dera*. Similarly, he wanted to know about the swords which were thrown into the well.

The Kuka Sikhs in the province particularly in the native states were put to hardships and humiliation. They were put under surveillance and their movements were watched carefully. The *zaildars* of the rural circles and the headmen of the villages were asked to submit the reports of the penalty or the punishment given to the Kuka Sikhs. The assembly of more than five Kuka Sikhs was banned throughout the province. Similarly, the carrying of axes, iron bond sticks and other weapons were prohibited. In spite of the state repression, the Namdhari Sikhs accelerated their struggle againt the government under the leadership of Satguru Hari Singh.

Notes and References

1. Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, Oxford India Paperbacks, 2001, p 118.
2. *Ibid*. Prerogative of initiation was also enjoyed by the Muslim religious leaders known as *Pirs*. Both in Islam and Sikhism, the tradition of *'Pir-Muridi'* and *'Gur-Sikhi'* was in vogue in 19th century.
3. M.M. Ahluwalia, *Kukas: The Freedom Fighters of Punjab*, Allied Publishers, New Delhi, 1965, p 54; also see, weekly Urdu newspaper, *Ashruf-ul-Akhbar*, Delhi, 19 December 1866, p 20.
4. Nahar Singh, Kirpal Singh (Eds.), *Rebels Against the British Rule*, Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, 1995, pp 158-165.
5. *Op.cit*., pp 135-138.
6. Harbans Singh (Ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. III, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1994, pp 15; also see, Khushwant Singh, *A History of Sikhs*, Vol II, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999, pp 64, 73, 81, 91, 94 and 101.
7. M.M. Ahluwalia, p 55.
8. For details, see, K.C. Yadav, "Interpreting 1857: A Case Study", in *Rethinking 1857* (Ed. Sabyasachi Bhattacharya), Orient Longman, 2007, pp 3-21; Piara Singh Padam, *Prachin Sau Sakhi*, Singh Brothers, Amritsar, 2001, p 11; Louis E. Fenech, *Martyrdom in the Sikh Tradition*, Oxford University Press, 2000, pp 167-168.
9. Cited by Nahar Singh in *Namdhari Sikhs: The Pioneer Freedom Fighters*, (ed. H.S. Hanspal), Namdhari Darbar, Bhaini Sahib, 2006, pp 50-51.
10. *Op.cit*., p 57.
11. *Op.cit*., p 58.
12. In this regard, Colonel McAndrew, Deputy Inspector General of Police, Ambala, refers to an incident of a brawl which took place between the two groups of Hira Singh Saqraudi and Suba Jawahar Singh at the village Khote, district Ferozepur in March 1871. Reprimanding his followers, he addressed that instead of quarrelling among themselves they should die for the protection of *gau-gareeb;* cited by Jaswant Singh Jass, *Baba Ram Singh Namdhari*, Kasturi Lal and Sons, Amritsar, 1962, p 96.
13. Nidhan Singh Alam, *Jug Paltaoo Satguru*, Namdhari Darbar, 2006, pp 112-113; The above mentioned programme of stopping the opening of the slaughter houses by the Namdhari Guru gives credence to the allegations of the British officials that attacks of the Kukas on the butchers took place with Namdhari Guru's connivance. It also contradicts another version of the Namdhari Guru's involvement. There is a story that the Namdhari Guru forbade his followers not to attack the Muslim butchers.

14. The number of these Kukas vary from 125 to 200: Bhai Nahar Singh, Kirpal Singh, p XX; Jaswinder Singh, *Kuka Movement*, Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, 1985, p VII.
15. Namdhari scholars have prepared a list of the Kuka martyrs on the basis of contemporary biographical literature and the archival records. There are variations in terms of number as well as names of these martyrs, their villages and districts/states. Prof. Malwinderjit Singh Waraich has done a commendable work in terms of updating the number as well as bio-data of these martyrs. In their recent works, Tara Singh Anjan and Kirpal Singh Kasel have given a list of 68 martyrs, villages/towns and districts/states they belonged to: see *Satguru Ram Singh Te Kuka Lehar* (Tara Singh Anjan), Publication Department, Government of India, 2008, pp 103-108; and *Tawarikh Sant Khalsa* (Kirpal Singh Kasel), Part-I, Arsee Publishers, Delhi, 2006, pp 685-693.
16. A summary narrative of the episode is given in Nahar Singh's *Documents II*, pp 57-72. This narrative prepared in the judicial branch represents a collection of all relevant correspondence received upto 8 April 1872, also see, Nahar Singh, Kirpal Singh, p 189.
17. Nahar Singh, Kirpal Singh, pp 272-273.
18. *Op.cit.*, pp 378-379; the signatories of this memorandum were: (1) Sardar Bakhshish Singh Sandhanwalia, (2) Sardar Bhagwan Singh, (3) Sardar Dyal Singh Majithia, (4) Sardar Jawahar Singh Zafarwal, (5) Sardar Mangal Singh Ramgarhia (Manager of the affairs of the Darbar Sahib, Sikh National Temple), (6) Sardar Goolab Singh Bhagowalia, (7) Sardar Ajit Singh Attariwala, (8) Sardar Thakur Singh Sindhanwalia, (9) Bhai Golah Singh Mahant Ramgarh, (10) Golab Singh Akal Bunga, (11) Bhai Golab Singh (Bare Derewala), (12) Bhai Bhagat Singh Granthi, (13) Bhai Jassa Singh, (14) Bhai Hira Singh Granthi.
19. *Op.cit.*, p 385.
20. Kirpal Singh Kasel, *Tavarikh Sant Khalsa*, Part-I, Arsee Publishers, Delhi, 2006, p 683.
21. Fauja Singh, p 120.

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5

NAMDHARI GURU IN EXILE: UNFOLDING HIS SOCIO-POLITICAL PLANS

I

Without holding a trial, the Namdhari Guru and his *subas* were exiled to Rangoon (now Yangon, Myanmar) in 1872. At the time of incidents of Malodh and Malerkotla, the Lieutenant Governor of Punjab was in Delhi. On hearing the Kuka attacks, he sent a telegram to the Governor General at Calcutta informing him of the magnitude of the danger posed by the Kukas to the Raj and endorsing the action taken by the local officials T.D. Forsyth, the Commissioner of Ambala and L.Cowan, Deputy Commissioner, Ludhiana. The government approved the action taken by these officials, particularly by Cowan. It was argued that he, no doubt, acted in haste but in good faith as necessary to the public safety. Lieutenant Governor deputed T.D. Forsyth to arrest the Namdhari Guru and his *subas*. On reaching Ludhiana in the evening of 16 January 1872, Forsyth instructed the Lieutenant Colonel Baillie to proceed to Kuka headquarters at Bhaini Sahib and bring the Namdhari Guru and his associates and relatives to Ludhiana. According to the official plan, the police party forced the Namdhari Guru and his associates to move to Ludhiana. The Namdhari Guru with his two *subas*, Sahib Singh and Jawahar Singh, and two personal attendants reached Ludhiana at about 1 a.m. on 18 January. Forsyth had already made arrangements for their transportation. After completing some formalities, the Namdhari Guru and his

associates were sent off to Allahabad by the morning train at 4 O' clock. Forsyth immediately dispatched a letter to the Government of Punjab justifying his action in the name of preserving peace in the whole of the province. The official action of dispatching the Namdhari Guru and his associates was arbitrary in the sense that the complicity of the Namdhari Guru in the outrage committed by his followers at Malodh and in the State of Malerkotla was yet to be proved. Nevertheless, Forsyth admitted that some time before the Amritsar murder, two men, Jhanda Singh and Mehar Singh, wanted to kill butchers and requested their Guru to allow them to execute their plan, but he (Namdhari Guru) strenuously forbade them. Nevertheless they perpetrated the crime. He further admitted that though he had a strong suspicion that these men were the culprits but the Namdhari Guru did not give any information to the government. Some time afterwards, Dal Singh, Mangal Singh, Dewan Singh and two others came and asked the Namdhari Guru's permission to commit the Raikot murder, but he forbade them, and they committed the deed without his knowledge. Forsyth alleged that the Namdhari Guru never gave any clue to the Government officers, not even when he was summoned to village Bassian by Macnabb and interrogated. The Commissioner further alleged that the Namdhari Guru kept 'the government in the dark as to the proceedings of his followers.' The Commissioner was not satisfied with Guru's reply that he was 'ignorant of British laws' and thought that 'there was no obligation resting on him to report the matter to the Government.' The Commissioner firmly believed that 'to allow such a man to be at liberty is the highest degree of danger.' He prayed for the sanction of his action and the issue of warrants under Regulation III of 1818 "for the detention in custody of Ram Singh and those of his *subas* who, during the next day or two, shall be apprehended and forwarded to the Magistrate of Allahabad".[1]

The Namdhari Guru was taken to the Allahabad Fort. After some time, he was deported to Rangoon. However, before his deportation the Government of India ordered a comprehensive inquiry for having full and sufficient evidence to justify the official action taken against him and his *subas*. This inquiry was conducted by W. Macnabb, Deputy Commissioner of Ambala. The Lieutenant Governor, Punjab appreciated some of the recommendations of Macnabb but did not see relevance in fixing the terms of imprisonment of the *subas*. Subsequently, the detention of each *suba* was assessed separately. However, Macnabb's recommendations were as follow:

1	Sahib Singh	To be detained in banishment for life.
2.	Rur Singh	To be detained for two years. (See note).
3.	Lakha Singh	To be detained in banishment for life.
4.	Kahn Singh	To be detained in banishment for life.
5.	Brahma Singh	To be detained for two years. (See note).
6.	Jawahar Singh	To be detained for life unless Kukaism collapses so as to cease to be matter of political anxiety.
7.	Maluk Singh	To be detained for two years. (See note).
8.	Man Singh	To be detained for three years. (See note).
9.	Hukma Singh	To be detained for one year (On release this man to be made over to the Nabha Raja).
10.	Pahara Singh	To be detained for ten years. (See note).
11.	Sardar Mangal Singh	In reference to this prisoner Macnabb writes:

> Sardar Mangal Singh was made over to us by the Maharaja of Patiala as his prisoner. I am not called on for an opinion regarding him. Further than to state that were he in the same position as the other I would recommend his immediate release, on the terms offered by him and if that is not approved would detain him in banishment for life.

Note: Macnabb further recommends "that the cases of these men be reconsidered with reference to the state of Kookaism in Punjab generally at the time when the period named for each shall have terminated; and that should it be thought expedient to allow their return, they should remain under Police surveillance at their homes and neither attend nor hold fairs or meetings."[2]

The following *subas* were detained in the Allahabad Central Jail: Sahib Singh, Rur Singh, Lakha Singh, Kahn Singh, Brahma Singh, Jawahar Singh, Maluk Singh, Man Singh, Hukma Singh and Pahara Singh. The eleventh man was Sardar Mangal Singh of Raipur, who was arrested and made over to the British Government by the Maharaja of Patiala. After sometime, these prominent Kuka leaders were sent to different places. For instance, Rur Singh, Maluk Singh and Pahara Singh were sent to the Asirgarh Fort; Jawahar Singh, Lakha Singh and Brahma Singh to Moulmein (Myanmar); and Sahib Singh and Kahn Singh to Aden.

Namdhari Guru's Detention in British Burma

Before transporting Namdhari Guru to Rangoon (now Yangon), the Government of India held correspondence with the Chief Commissioner, Burma (now Myanmar) regarding his lodging arrangements in a building which was to be safe from the security point of view. The Chief Commissioner,

Burma suggested that 'Kuka Guru' be located in the Cantonment Post Office which was situated close to the main guard and was the house in which the last Mughal King (Bahadur Shah Zafar) of Delhi was confined. The Secretary to the Government of India instructed the Chief Commissioner, British Burma that

> Ram Singh is accompanied by two servants. Ram Singh should not be subjected to any severity, and should be allowed such liberty of exercise and of taking his air as may be necessary for his health. His status was that of a petty Zamindar in Punjab.[3]

Since Kuka Guru was to be the State prisoner he was provided with the following facilities:[4]

1.	Cow	Rs 75/-
2.	Food and servants	Rs 40/- per month
3.	Shoes and clothing	Rs 40/- (purchased)
4.	Chair, table, *pankha (Fan)*	Rs 50/- (spent)
5.	Three high caste Hindu prisoners, besides one servant who arrived with the prisoners from India provided.	

He was also provided with a carriage which was to be hired occasionally for the outdoor exercise if medical opinion advised that. Nevertheless, the Namdhari Guru, being a State prisoner, was not allowed to communicate with his friends, relatives and followers. However, he was allowed to keep the following religious literature: *Ad Panj Granthi* (a) *Japji* (b) *Bani Rahiras* (c) *Kirtan Sohila* (d) *Onkar* (e) *Sukhmani* (f) *Asa-di-Var* and (g) *Nauwan Guru Ka Shabad Aur Shalok.* He was also allowed to keep other *pothees:* (a) *Akal Ustat* (b) *Chandi Chariter,* (c) *Bachittar Natak* (d) *Gyan Parbodh* (e) *Sawayia.*

The Namdhari Guru was put under a strict surveillance so that the relation between him and his followers could be snapped. The British Government was quite apprehensive that a constant interaction between him and his followers

would be politically dangerous. In fact, the British's intention was to deprive the Kuka Movement of his leadership. Moreover, the British also wanted to demoralise the Kukas in Punjab. Meanwhile, the British implemented the policy of its retribution; isolating the Kukas socially and politically; humiliating them in public and awarding various corporal punishments. In spite of these restrictions, the Namdhari Guru was able to address a number of letters to his followers which were intercepted by the police. In 1877, the Punjab Government regretted over the inadequate surveillance. The government was scared of the exchange of letters between the Namdhari Guru and his followers. Expressing its anger it wrote to the Government of India that "it is notorious that in spite of all prohibition and the directions which have been issued by the Government of India on the subject, Ram Singh does frequently correspond with his followers in Punjab. Several copies of such letters have been confidentially made over to this Government"[5]. The Punjab Government also informed the Government of India in the same letter that a *Bairagi Faqir* was living near the venue of Baba Ram Singh's confinement. From that venue, it was easier to throw letters attached to stones or clods of earth, over the walls, and to receive answers in the same manner'. The Lieutenant Governor suggested that it might be better to remove the Namdhari Guru Ram Singh from Rangoon to some other place where he could be more efficiently watched. The Home Department of India also wrote to the authorities in Burma that "Ram Singh is a very dangerous man and correspondence with him must be stopped by whatever means."[6] The Punjab Government's apprehensions were not notional. It obtained a large number of letters which were exchanged between Namdhari Guru and his followers. The Lieutenant Governor realised that it was due to his continuous interaction which encouraged his followers to submit petitions for the release of the Namdhari Guru. The Lieutenant Governor also noted with concern that the

Namdhari Guru's letters could raise the morale of his followers as they would believe that their Guru could 'destroy the *Miri* ánd *Piri* i.e. the temporal and spiritual authorities of the time'. In the wake of this development, the government thought of removing Kuka Guru to Mergui.

Inquiries were also made in regard to the Kuka prisoners who were locked in the forts of Aden, Asirgarh, Moulmein and Chunar. For delinking these prisoners from the outside world, they were shifted to different jails and kept in solitary confinement. For example, Sahib Singh was transferred from Aden to the European Jail at Hazaribagh where he expired on 10 June 1879. Kahn Singh was left alone in Aden jail. He was a weak, decrepit old man of over 70 years.

To the dismay of the Punjab Government, Kuka Movement got its momentum in the wake of Afghan War in 1877-78. In 1879, Kuka Gurcharan Singh became active in Russia and Turkistan and carried on activities on behalf of his Guru Ram Singh. A Hindi letter was found in his possession which was said to be written by Guru Ram Singh. The letter mentioned that Guru Ram Singh was shown as the spiritual leader of 3,15,000 Kukas who were all brave soldiers. Bishan Singh was another prominent Kuka leader who was the courier for communications between Russians and Budh Singh (Namdhari Guru Hari Singh). Bishan Singh operated his own business in Peshawar, Kabul, Bokhara and Russian territory. The Government of India wanted to stop these communications. It directed the Chief Commissioner of British Burma to remove the Namdhari Guru to Mergui. The Chief Commissioner ordered his removal on 29 May 1878. However, it was in 1880 that the Namdhari Guru was made to board a ship, *Ananda* and put into a new house (which was built for him) with a small kitchen and latrine.

For the time being interaction between the Namdhari Guru and his followers stopped. Nevertheless, the urge among his followers was so powerful that they managed to

locate the Guru's house in Mergui. Between 1879-1881 several of his disciples met him and smuggled his letters back to Bhaini Sahib. Important among these disciples were Mihan Singh and Samund Singh.[7] The number of these letters was eighty to one hundred.

The Namdhari Guru's stay in Mergui jail was quite hard. He was very upset over the treatment given by the local officials to his disciples who came to see him. The official reports make us believe that the Namdhari Guru's behaviour was violent and his movements were confined to his room. Solitary confinement started telling upon his health. He died on 29 November 1885 at 4.30 p.m. According to an official statement, he had several attacks of Diarrhoea since 22 November, and all efforts to induce him to take medicine had proved futile. Due to old age his constitution was on the breaking point and he died quite exhausted on 29 November in the presence of the Civil Surgeon.[8] The report of the Civil Surgeon further stated that "the body was cremated this morning, the cremation was commenced at 7.45 and was completed by 9.05, and that the ashes will be collected from the crematory when it is quite cooled down, placed in new earthen vessel and merged into the river according to the Hindu custom."[9]

The news of Namdhari Guru's death spread by the British shocked his spiritual successor, relatives and Kuka Sikhs. They refused to believe that their Guru could die leaving his task unfinished. A report of Home Secretary Punjab dated l February 1889 stated that "the Kukas for one thing absolutely refuse to believe in the death of their Guru Ram Singh and maintain that he is alive and will return to restore the Khalsa Kingdom.[10] Suba Kahn Singh who was released last year, also told the Kukas that Guru Ram Singh was alive and will soon return. Baba Budh Singh (brother of Guru Ram Singh) believed that his brother was alive and the British only removed him from Rangoon to some other

place. It was ironical that the British themselves believed that

> Guru Ram Singh had impressed upon his followers the necessity of conspiring with Russia at all hazards, and that the Kukas would be against the English till Ram Singh is restored to them. Guru Ram Singh had been incarnated to defend religion and to stop cow-killing in India and the Kukas would never abate their exertions till it was stopped.[11]

Namdhari scholars (Tara Singh Anjan, Jaswinder Singh, Santokh Singh Bahowal and Sant Nidhan Singh Alam) and historians like Fauja Singh and M M Ahluwalia strongly believe that the reported death of the Namdhari Guru by the Civil Surgeon did not take place. The Namdhari scholars believe that the Civil Surgeon and jail officials concocted a story of Guru's death in British jail whereas "Guru performed the miracle of escaping from the clutches of his captors towards the end of the year 1885. In their (officials) anxiety to absolve themselves of their responsibility, the authorities fabricated the story of the death of Guru Ram Singh.[12] M M Ahluwalia has summed up the refutation of the official version by the Namdhari scholars. He says that

1. he had the chance to accompany the Kuka leader Satguru Pratap Singhji when he visited Siam in the year 1934. While returning from Bangkok, the party took the steamer bound for Rangoon. The steamer touched Mergui in its course. The Kuka leader and his followers, including the above writer, got down there in order to make inquiries about Guru Ram Singh, the erstwhile state prisoner. The party met an old Sikh living in the suburbs of Mergui, who volunteered the following statement:
   I am about 70 years old now, and for the last twenty years I have been living here and selling milk. I had the chance to inquire about Guru Ram Singh from a very old Burmese monk. He told me that he (Guru Ram Singh) was a person

of vast powers, and his very appearance bestowed peace upon the onlooker. At first, he was kept in jail but subsequently he was put up in a bungalow on the seashore. He was not strictly guarded. One day, he disappeared from captivity and could not be found in spite of best efforts. Perchance, a Dogra prisoner who also bore the name Ram Singh, died suddenly. The authorities took advantage of this situation. They gave out that the Kuka Guru had died, while actually performing the last rites of that Dogra soldier. It was nothing but a political stunt.

2. The height and physique of Satguru Ram Singh was better than Guru Hari Singhji. But, after announcing the death of Guru Ram Singh, the clothes that were returned to Guru Hari Singh by the authorities at Ludhiana were so tight for Guru Hari Singh that he could not wear them. Apparently these clothes belonged to some thin and short-statured person and not Guru Ram Singh.
3. Satguru Hari Singh called upon the authorities to return to him the book from which Satguru Ram Singh used to read the holy verses and also the metallic pot he invariably used. That would, at least, provide some proof in support of what the Government claimed. But the Government could not hand back either of these two things.
4. Sardar Alam Singh S. D.O. (Punjab) publicised in a Namdhari paper *Satjug*, his claim that in the year 1890 he had the privilege of meeting Satguru Ram Singh in Moulmein (Burma), and obtaining his blessings. He challenged the Government to refute his claim but there was no refutation forthcoming.
5. The statements of some of the high officials of the Government of India about the death of Guru Ram Singh are quite conflicting. The Indian Census Report (of Mr Maclagan) says Guru Ram Singh died in Rangoon in the year 1887 or 1888.

   Lastly, according to the present Kuka sources, a number of Kukas accompanied Guru Ram Singh in the bullock-cart when he left his home in the year 1872 for exile in

> Burma. In the way, he forewarned his companions again and again not to believe what the British announced about his life or death. He had claimed: "This body can sustain for 250 years." Accordingly, the Kukas firmly believe to this day that their beloved leader Satguru Ram Singh is still alive, and would once again be amidst them in the near future.[13]

As noted earlier in the chapter, the Namdhari Guru wrote a large number of letters popularly known as *ardasan* or *hukamnamas*. He wrote these letters from Rangoon and Mergui to his relatives and followers. His exile and confinement to a lonely place mark the last but very important phase of his life. These letters reflect the Namdhari Guru's introspection as he had enough time to ponder over his mission and activities. Simultaneously, these letters also reflect his perception of the Kuka Movement which was continued by his brother and successor Hari Singh and other *Subas* and *Jathedars*. Since all letters written by him have not survived, therefore, there is every possibility of misunderstanding the Namdhari Guru's perception on some vital issues. There were many reasons for the disappearance of these letters. First and foremost reason was that the Namdhari Guru himself instructed his followers and relatives to destroy them lest these could be intercepted by the police and scuttle Namdhari activities. Presumably all the letters available in the National Archives (England and India) have been published first by Dr Gainda Singh in 1944 and then by Jaswinder Singh in 1998.

The nature and scope of his letters are quite comprehensive. The scholars and intellectuals have quoted these letters for constructing the Namdhari *maryada*, institutions and socio-political activities. Similarly, the British officials too used his letters for constructing their viewpoint and depicting the Namdhari Guru as a dangerous man for

the British Raj. However, these letters are a valuable source for understanding the Namdhari Guru's primary concerns and motives. According to these letters, he wanted to restore the Khalsa Raj and establish a social order free from any discrimination and exploitation. These letters also highlight the problems and challenges faced by the Namdhari Sikhs at the hands of the British and their allies. Moreover, these letters served as a mode of communion between him and his followers. The Namdhari Guru made every possible effort to keep up the morale of his followers who continued the struggle and even laid down their lives. Since Namdhari Guru possessed a rich spiritual experience and was well versed in Sikh scriptures and traditions, it is appropriate to define and interpret contents of his letters in the context of Sikh religion and history.

To begin with the Namdhari Guru's relationship with his followers we find a continuity of genre of *hukamnamas* of the 17th and 18th centuries in the Namdhari literature. Like the *hukamnamas*, the relationship has been explained in terms of Guru and *sangat*. However, the Namdhari Guru's perception is different. Explaining the meaning of Guru, the Namdhari Guru was so humble that he denied having attained the status of Guru in the popular sense. He called himself a watchman. A symbolic reference for watchman in gurbani is *paharua* who drives away five evils: *kam* (sexuality), *karodh* (anger), *moh* (infatuation), *lobh* (greed) and *ahankar* (arrogance). There are a number of references in his letters wherein the Namdhari Guru was asking his followers to give up these five evils. As we shall note that there were a few followers who committed these offences and the Guru was worried about the dangerous consequences of their lapses.

The relationship between the Namdhari Guru and *sangat* was abruptly broken when he was exiled to Rangoon. In his absence, his successor, relatives and followers faced repression let loose by the state. Some of his close confidants

and followers were liquidated in the incidents of Amritsar and Malerkotla when he was present at his own headquarters. It was painful for him to know the British brutality perpetrated on his followers at Malerkotla in 1872. Being a spiritual preceptor of his *sangat*, he was bound to protect them but he was helpless. When he was confined to the far off lonely place the Namdhari Guru's helplessness gave way to anger and agony. There are several references in his letters expressing his agony. Moreover, he was pained to know the way British officials treated his disciples who came to see him. Yet appreciating their courage and conviction, he wrote

> Your conduct is praiseworthy in as much as you have travelled a great distance and have crossed the sea in order to pay me a visit. You have performed the duties of Sikhs, but I have not at all acted the part of a Guru.[14]

When the Namdhari Guru noted the sufferings and hardships under which his followers went through, he tried to persuade them to avoid long journeys. At the same time, he continuously expressed his wish to see them. In one of the letters, he says

> Brother, my wish to see you is many degrees stronger than yours. Whereas you can see fellow Sikhs, I cannot have a glimpse of those who are committed to the Name. If the Guru permits, I will see the *sangat*. My brother, my relations are actually with the *sangat* rather with sisters and brothers.[15]

Some of his letters throw an ample light on his perception of Singh or Sikh. Both these terms have been used synonymously. In addition to these terms, he also uses the concept of Khalsa. The context of his letters suggests that these three terms refer to the Namdhari Guru's followers. However, he defines the meaning of these terms with reference to *bani*. Some time, his context is the Sikh history

or tradition. To begin with the first two terms (Singh and Sikh), he says that a Sikh is that person who believes in Guru-Sabad or Sabad-Guru which implies a belief in gurbani.

> A person who does not believe in Guru-Sabad or Sabad-Guru can neither claim himself a Sikh nor a saint. He may appear in any form. All *sastras* tell us that a faith in Guru-sabad alone can be helpful.[16]

In Sikhism concepts of *sabad* and *guru* are identical. For the Namdhari Guru, *Guru-Sabad* was Supreme Lord. In Granth Sahib, it is stated that

> Set your mind on the *guru-sabad* which is over and above everything else (G.G. 904)
> Through the *sabad* one recognises the adorable Lord
> Through the word of the guru *(gurvak)*, he is imbued with the truth (GG55)[17]

In these letters the Namdhari Guru often uses the concept of Guru which implies God. Each of his letters begins with *mulmantra* which means 'God is one and He is attained through Guru's grace'. The Namdhari Guru strongly believed in what Guru Nanak said that God was his only Guru and contrasted true Guru with false human Gurus. In both spiritual and temporal affairs, the Namdhari Guru held the primacy of God. Some of his letters also begin with the proverbial mode of salutation of the Khalsa:

> I, Ram Singh, write to whole Khalsa congregation of Bhaini and whole Khalsa ji, accept my salutation Sri Vahiguru ji ka Khalsa, Sri Vahiguru ji ki Fateh.[18]

On these precepts the Namdhari Guru perceived Bedis and Sodhis false Gurus and imposters. It is said that he used to say *Sapon, Shihon, Sodhion, Bakhsh lain Kartar* (save us from serpents, lions and Sodhis, O God).[19] As noted in the milieu, the descendents of Sodhis of Anandpur and Kartarpur and Bedis of Dera Baba Nanak and Rawalpindi owned huge

estates and had thousands of devotees. Since these Sodhis and Bedis were false Gurus, the Namdhari Guru exhorted his *sangat* to worship true Guru alone and perform *akhand paths* of Granth Sahib. We have numerous references in his letters in regard to his faith in the primacy of Granth Sahib. He himself denied that neither he was Guru nor he intended to be that. It was his adversaries who launched a false propaganda against him. He said, "I am not Guru, praise the true Guru. Whatever you wish to have, pray to *Nam* (God) for that thing. *Nam* alone can bestow things. *Nam* alone is forgiver. I too beg *Nam*. Do not praise me. Praise the creator of the universe".[20]

Namdhari Guru Ram Singh revived that *rahit-maryada* whose main attributes are to be found in the *Adi-Granth*, Dasam Granth, *Prem Sumarag* and Sau-Sakhis. His faith in the prophesies made in *Prem Sumarag* and Sau-Sakhis was unflinching. In one of the letters, he says

> The Guru is unfathomable; he knows what is to happen, but it has so been decried by the Guru and consequently I have communicated it to you. There is no necessity for me to write out orders *(Hukamnama)*. He who wants to see and obey them, should read the Guru's orders. It is useless simply to see them without obeying their contents. Two Garanths' "100 Sakhis"; and *Prem Sumarag* are the *hukamnamas* for all congregations and people of all castes and persuasions.[21]

However, *rahit-maryada* prescribed by him for the Sant Khalsa was similar which had been advocated in *Prem Sumarag* too. The literal meaning of *Prem Sumarag* is 'true way to love'.

> It is an anonymous work in old Punjabi evoking a model Sikh way of life and of Sikh society. Written probably in the eighteenth century, it is a kind of rahitnama attempting to prescribe norms of behaviour, religious as well as social, private as well as public, for the members of the Khalsa

Panth. It also provides a comprehensive model of Sikh polity with details concerning civil and military administration.[22]

Comparison of the contents of chapters of *Prem Sumarag* with Namdhari Guru Ram Singh's letters suggests that the latter was inspired to realise that objective for which the Khalsa was created by Guru Gobind Singh. The degenerated condition of the Khalsa and Khalsa Fauj of Lahore Kingdom forced the Namdhari Guru to revive Guru Gobind Singh's true Khalsa which could face the onslaughts unleashed by the *malechh*. For him *malechh* were those people who were inimical to the Sikh way of life and Khalsa Raj. From *Prem Sumarag*, the Namdhari Guru came to realise that it was imperative for a true Sikh to expunge evil and promote virtue. *Prem Sumarag* further laid down the following daily routine for a Sikh:

The daily routine prescribed for a Sikh consists in getting up early in the morning, taking a bath, reciting *Japu* and *Jap* five times in the morning. *Japu* and *Jap* at noon. *Sodar, Japu,* and *Jap* in the evening and readings from the *Bachitra Natak* and *Kirtan Sohila* before going to bed. (1) The stress is on constant remembrance of God, honest work, mutual help and love. (2) A Sikh must shun flirtation and adultery, greed, anger, theft, egocentricity, speaking ill of other, falsehood and even truth that harms others, he must always keep the arms by his side, work for his living, be hospitable, address fellow Sikh as 'Singh ji,' and resign himself, in all situations, to the Will of the Almighty. The book also lays down the method of Khalsa initiation and principles of social behaviour (3) rituals to be observed at child-birth (4) rules regarding the selection of life-partners, the age for marriage, permitting a widow to remarry (5) the kind of food a Sikh should partake of and the kind, especially intoxicants, that he must avoid, laying special emphasis on cleanliness (6) the dress and ornaments a Sikh should wear, the occupations he should pursue and those

he must forbear from (7) Truth telling is prized most. He who perjures his oath shall fall 'into the dark pit of hell. He who renders false witness sins. Even kings cannot claim exemption from these moral norms. [23]

Beside, the *Prem Sumarag* enunciates the form of Sikh polity which was essentially a benevolent monarchy vesting absolute power in a king, not in the *Panth*. The King occupied a central place taking decisions independently and administering justice. According to *Prem Sumarag*, the king owed special considerations to the Khalsa Panth, Punjabi was to be the official language of the state and all Sikh children were to be given instruction in the Khalsa *rahit*. Although, Namdhari Guru Ram Singh's letters did not delve into the realm of Sikh polity yet political activities of the Kukas were directed towards the restoration of the Khalsa Raj. Namdhari Guru Ram Singh's concept of the Khalsa Raj falls within the depiction of Sikh polity in the *Prem Sumarag*.

Reference to the Sau-Sakhis in the Namdhari Guru's letters and also by the Kukas was essentially meant for the realisation of Khalsa Raj and mobilisation of the Namdhari activists towards that goal. It was through these letters that the Namdhari Guru guided the temporal and spiritual affairs of his followers. Sau-Sakhis became instrumental in his hand for it had the potential to rejuvenate the Khalsa for its ultimate triumph over its enemy. Faith of the Khalsa that Khalsa shall rule had been posing a threat to the established authority. Towards the end of his life, Namdhari Guru Ram Singh firmly believed in the verses of the Sau-Sakhis. During his life time, the Sau-Sakhis were not merely religious texts rather these became a text of polity to be established in near future.[24]

As referred to earlier, the Namdhari followers circulated a new version of the Sau-Sakhis as early as 1863. It was on the basis of these Sakhis that they perceived their spiritual master as the personification of Guru Gobind Singh and

sought to fulfill their aspirations. It is alleged that they made several changes and interpolations in the text of Sau-Sakhis purportedly written by Bhai Gurbakhash Singh, better known as Bhai Ram Kunwar (1672-1761) and a member of the retinue of Guru Gobind Singh. After the annexation of the Khalsa Raj, the Sau-Sakhis became popular among the Sikhs as they prophesised the re-establishment of Sikh sovereignty under Maharaja Dalip Singh. Maharaja Dalip Singh had become thoroughly disillusioned with the British government as he felt that they cleverly set aside his claim over the Khalsa Raj. In 1886, he resolved to quit England and came to his native country. This news sent a thrill of joy through the whole body of the Kuka Sikhs who were looking forward to Dalip Singh's return with pleasure. They also formed a deputation and started travelling to Bombay. According to the Punjab Government, the Kuka Sikhs believed that Satguru Ram Singh's spirit had entered into Dalip Singh.[25] The Namdhari Sikhs circulated these Sakhis among the people for spreading the idea that Namdhari Guru Ram Singh would return from the exile and there would be a rise of Muhammadan Chief on the North-West of India. Simultaneously, Russia would invade India to help Maharaja Dalip Singh and Kuka Sikhs for the overthrow of the British rule.[26] As we shall see, Namdhari Guru Ram Singh was well-aware of these prophecies and wanted to know the situation prevailing in the north-west region of India and Russian advances towards Punjab.

Nevertheless, in spite of Namdhari Guru Ram Singh's references to the *Prem Sumarag* and Sau-Sakhis in his letters, the central authority of his *maryada* remained vested in Guru Granth and Dasam Granth. It is not, therefore, a coincidence that since Namdhari Guru Ram Singh's time, the Namdhari scholars and activists further contextualise *rahit-maryada* in the *Adi-Granth* and illustrate it on the basis of *gurbani*. They also illustrate *rahit-maryada* with reference to the works of Bhai Gurdas, Bhai Nand Lal and Giani Gian Singh etc.[27]

However, relevance of *nam-simran* is more pronounced in the letters of the Namdhari Guru.

> O Khalsa! be firm in your morning worship of the Creator, and this and all other discomforts, will be removed. Be assured of this truth, for the Guru Sahib has said that ailments can be removed by the worship of the Creator. Continue fervent reading of God's word. *Nam* (mystical emblem of the Kukas) and *Bani* (word of God) have a close affinity to one another. Consider the power of the *Nam*. By the power of the *Nam* several thousand *Bhogs*, (ceremony of reading the Granth through) have been performed, and several thousand Sikhs have taken to reading the *Bani*. By (reading) the Bani the beauties of the *Nam* of God are discussed. In short, *Nam* and *Bani* are priceless treasures; it is not possible to estimate their value. O Khalsa! The Guru Sahib has been graciously pleased to confer upon you this *Nam* and *Bani*, therefore, be firm in reciting the *Nam* and *Bani* day and night, whether moving or working; always strive to step forwards, never backwards. The present is the time for your amendment, as here after you will not again receive the present birth (i.e., the human form). O Khalsa! At the time of birth and death all things having life suffer much pain, and, excepting the human race, no species of creation enjoys the privileges *of Nam, dan* (charity) and *ashnan* (ablution). This likewise is the order of the Guru, that all who forget the Name of God in the present birth, will never again obtain help, but their souls will continue to pass from one body into another and will become a worm of corruption. The Guru Sahib has thus spoken in praise of the *Nam*. All who recite the Name of God will inherit exaltation, joy, perpetual happiness and prosperity. The praises of the *Nam* are endless.[28]

In *gurbani* too a higher prominence is given to the *nam-simran*. Meditation on the *nam* leads to the stage of bliss. In the company of meditator, the people are liberated from

human bonds and greed. A person he who does not meditate spits poison. Bhai Gurdas refers to *amrit-vela* an 'ambrosial hour' (3 am to 6 am) for meditation. The *rahitnamas* underline this injunction since then. Namdhari Guru Ram Singh carried forward that tradition.

> And, O brethren of the Khalsa, read the *Granth Sahib* yourself as often as you possibly can and get others to read it. If one cannot read fully and completely the *Granth Sahib*, then have it completed by two or four Sikhs; do not make greater arrangements; do not collect the Sikhs of other villages; do your utmost to complete the *Bhog* with *Parshad* (halwa). Many Sikhs have written to say that they cannot commit to memory the *Bani;* the Guru Sahib directed the learning of the *Bani*, whereupon the Sikh urged that he could not possibly learn it and would not be able to learn. The Guru Sahib told him to throw down a single stone at a time before him. That Sikh did as he was told, and in time succeeded in raising quite a mound. The Guruji then remarked to the Sikh that if, by depositing a single stone at a time, he had succeeded in raising a mound, where would be the difficulty in learning to read, if he acquired a single letter at a time? That Sikh took the hint and commenced learning a letter at a time, until he succeeded in being able to read. In like manner, O Khalsa! All who learn one or two lines daily, will very soon have learnt several *Banis*. Be assured of this truth. Men and women, old and young, all should commit the *Bani* to memory.[29]

He told that the *simran* could break the bondages of the caste-structure and liberate man. It could also raise his social status. In this regard the Namdhari Guru cited his own example. He said that if thousands of people worshipped him as their Guru it was due to the power of his *nam-simran*.[30] Otherwise, he came from an artisan family and artisans were under privileged and socially inferiors. They were called

kammi/ kamins by the agriculturists. *Nam-Simran* gave Namdhari Guru Ram Singh spiritual strength to face such abuses and taunts.

The Namdhari Guru's injunctions expected the Namdhari Sikhs to be strict vegetarians. These injunctions also exhorted them to abstain from intoxicants: liquor and tobacco. The *rahitnamas* and *Prem Sumarag* are unanimous in prohibiting tobacco and eating *kutha*— a meat prepared according to Muslim rite. If there was anything which the Namdhari Guru abhorred strongly it was beef eating. He told his followers that those who, whether Sikhs or Hindus, took beef, shall perish. For him they were not Sikhs or Hindus. Similarly, Dalip Singh was not Sikh as he ate beef. For the Namdhari Guru slaughtering cows and beef-eating were crime and sin in the big country of the Hindus. He reminded his followers that in our country several customs were related to the worship of cows. The way British allowed slaughtering of cows, he apprehended, the country would be empty of cows. Realising the relevance of the cow in the agrarian economy, he was of the opinion that slaughtering of cows would adversely affect the health of the poor people. They would neither get milk nor bulls for agriculture.[31]

Namdhari Guru Ram Singh asked his followers to work for livelihood as he disliked parasites. He gave instructions to the people living at Dera Bhaini Sahib that they should not spend their time in an idle way and always keep themselves busy either in doing work or reciting *path* from *Granth Sahib*. The Namdhari Guru wished that every follower should become self-dependent. At the same time, they should take care of the needy people. No hungry man, irrespective of his religious affiliations, should leave the *dera* without having food and clothes. He believed that *pun-dan* (sacred acts of charity) lead to the state of spiritual joy and bliss. However, he was not specific to whom *pun-dan* should be given. Besides, he exhorted his followers that they should not appropriate others' property. Stealing was both a crime

and a sin. Similarly, the Namdhari Guru asked his followers to pay back the debts if they had incurred any. Withholding debt was a bigger crime than *thagi*. In fact, he was aware about the implications of the petty evils which could wreck the life of a common man. Stealing or appropriating property or withholding debt, was resulting into the litigation. Increasing volume of litigation was a vicious trap in which a very large number of a marginalised peasantry was falling during the second half of the 19th century. Litigation was essentially the by-product of legal-structure which the British established in Punjab. When Namdhari Guru Ram Singh was exiled the symptoms of malfunctioning of this structure had begun to appear in the agrarian society of Punjab.[32]

As noted in the third chapter, since the Namdhari Guru's followers came mainly from the agrarian society, he addressed to these social maladies and gave a practical solution to escape from them. Addressing to the magnitude of these problems, the Namdhari Guru exhorted his followers to stop committing female infanticide and selling daughters for marriage. For him these practices were bigger crime and sin than cow killing. He said that who ever made money by marriage of his daughter was a rascal. In case, somebody married his girl either in exchange or for money he should be boycotted by the Namdhari community. He reminded his followers that these practices often resulted into the suffering and humiliation both for daughters and parents.[33]

The Namdhari Guru told his Khalsa that those indulging in such practices, must not be allowed to participate in the congregation *(sangat)*; nothing should be accepted from their hands and the Khalsa should not visit their houses. In fact, the Namdhari Guru was reiterating those injunctions of *rahitnamas* of the 18th century which declared female-infanticide as one of the five instances of reprobation. The *rahitnamas* of this century gave prominence to this injunction because the practice of female-infanticide was observed by the Khalsa too. The other four, a baptised

Sikh should avoid interaction with *Minas, Dhirmalias, Ramrais,* and *nari-mars.* Some *rahitnamas* also include *sir-gum* (those who cut their hairs).[34] For abolishing these practices, the Namdhari Guru came up with the solution that girls should be taught skills of reading and writing; they should be well versed in *gurbani* which would make them spiritually stronger. He further suggested that a daughter should be married while she was young. But she should not be below the age of puberty. He ordered his followers that none should accept the girl of eighteen and boy of twenty.[35]

There are a few references to the marriage ceremonies in *rahitnamas* of the 18th century. Daya Singh's *rahitnama* simply says:

> Do not celebrate a marriage without using Anand Order. Chaupa Singh rehitnama states that a gursikh should not give his daughter (in marriage) to *mona* though he could accept daughter of a mona father. Both boy and girl should be initiated at the time of marriage. It is also mentioned that at the time of marriage donate 1¼ rupee as an offering. Do not accept food from anyone who has a marriage performed by a Brahman.[36]

However, the *Prem Sumarag* often referred by the Namdhari Guru, gives details of the procedure of a Khalsa marriage which is as follow: "It involves superstition; it takes account of caste; *Anand* is not recited; the physical circumstances for ritual are alien; it has a sacred fire fed by *ghee;* and the *lavan* are performed around this fire instead of around the *Guru Granth Sahib.*" [37] The mode of Namdhari marriage is closer to the prescription of *Prem Sumarag.*

The Namdhari Guru was the first leader who perceived the downfall of the Khalsa Raj in moral terms. He noted that the successors of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, his *darbaris* and *ahalkars* were trapped into the menace of prostitution and homosexuality. They had compromised with the moral and ethical values for which the Khalsa was appreciated even

by his adversaries during the 18th century.[38] Subsequently, the Khalsa Fauj, marginalised the civil authority of the Kingdom of Lahore and indulged into anarchy. The Namdhari Guru himself witnessed this moral depravity and fratricidal killings. It was painful for him to see that so-called custodians of the Khalsa Raj did not refrain from liquidating the leaders like Bhai Bir Singh of Naurangabad to Namdhari Guru Ram Singh who were held in great esteem. As stated in the beginning, it was the anarchy of the Khalsa Fauj and of Dogra brothers which accelerated the process of a collapse of this Raj. It was this disgusting situation which forced Namdhari Guru Ram Singh to quit the service of the Khalsa Fauj. After the annexation of the Khalsa Raj there were a few veterans of this Raj who refused to accept the British Raj and carried on the torch of freedom. Among them was Bhai Maharaj Singh, who was Bhai Bir Singh's follower. Nevertheless, these veterans were opposed and despised by the Sikh *sardars, mahants* and *pujaris* whose vested interests synchronised with the British Raj. Commenting on the moral depravity of such Sikhs, the Namdhari Guru says

> Very recently, the Khalsa played suicidal game. First it eliminated (Baba) Bir Singh (of Naurangabad) and then forced (Bhai) Maharaj Singh to disappear. Now Khalsa played a similar game against me.[39]

In the wake of the struggle against the Muslims, the authors of *rahitnamas* constantly felt the menace of sexual morality in the sense that 'Singhs' might be tempted to have their sexual gratification with the prostitutes who were largely Muslim women. To keep the 'Singhs' away from this evil, the authors of the *rahitnamas* considered sexual intercourse with Turkani (Muslim women) a religious offence i.e. one of the *kurahits,* a violation of the code of conduct.[40] They further apprehended that occasional sexual intercourse could turn the Singhs into debauchee as prostitution centres in major towns of Punjab especially Lahore had come into

being. Power and wealth acquired by the Singhs in the last quarter of the 18th century could generate laxity among them.

Meanwhile, menace of prostitution had crept into the town of Amritsar. Giving warning to one of his devotees, the Namdhari Guru said "the people of Amritsar had to suffer from prostitution and sodomy. You know how Hira Singh suffered from this indulgence. There are several such cases."[41] It may be pointed out here that in the post-annexation period of Punjab, the traditional *sants* and *babas* particularly the descendents of Sodhis and Bedis did not play any role in checking the moral depravity among the Sikhs. It was left to the Namdhari Guru to take up cudgels against this degradation.

The menace of moral depravity assumed dangerous proportions under the British rule because some of the European civil and military personnel were bachelors and those who were married, did not bring their wives and children from England to the places where they were posted. The servants, maid-servants and prostitutes satisfied their sexual desires. The life of military personnel was more notorious than that of the civil officials.[42]

The Namdhari Guru imagined that the Sant Khalsa could play the role of the custodian of temporal and spiritual affairs of the Sikhs. For providing the legitimacy to this Khalsa, the Namdhari Guru believed and advocated that he was only an instrument in the hands of Guru Gobind Singh for founding the Sant Khalsa. Since Sant Khalsa was the creation of Guru Gobind Singh, he believed that it was going to be an everlasting creation. He further believed and advocated that God's creation could not be demolished by humans. It was precisely for this reason that Namdhari Guru Ram Singh was not afraid of the then rulers and their allies—sardars and priests who wanted to demolish the Sant Khalsa.[43] However, he cited another reason for which the Sant Khalsa was brought into being. He noted that in his contemporary society, there were neither true Sikhs nor the

Khalsa. The founder of Sikhism expected that the true Sikhs would perform *nam-simran* and the Khalsa would strive for those values which were cherished by Guru Gobind Singh himself. It was for this reason that Guru bequeathed *Granth Sahib* to the Sikhs and expected from the Sikhs to perform *bhog*. By *bhog*, the Namdhari Guru implied that it was obligatory for the true Sikhs to recite *bani* and meditate in the *nam* of God. Nevertheless, it was painful for him to note that the contemporary Sikhs, particularly wealthy Sikhs and *mahants* and *pujaris* and *gianis*, had abdicated the obligations of a true Sikh. They had gone astray from the spiritual path. It was left to the Namdhari Sikhs alone to perform *bhog*. He regretted that the latter were declared *tankhayias* by such custodians of Sikhism. For Namdhari Guru Ram Singh it was an ironical situation.

Namdhari Guru Ram Singh was absolutely clear about the reasons for which the wealthy and priestly classes were opposed to the Namdhari Sikhs. He noted that right from Guru's period, there had been a contradiction between the wealthy and the people aspiring for spiritual quest. The former always perceived a threat to their existence from the latter. He quoted Guru Nanak's verse in this context. If his contemporary wealthy sections opposed the Namdhari Sikhs, it was not a surprise. They were the cursed people. Crying foul was their habit.[44]

Namdhari Guru Ram Singh noted that the British and landed aristocracy did not understand the fact that Namdharis were Guru Gobind Singh's creation. If the Namdhari Sikhs made powerful movement, it was due to Guru's grace. In contrast to the behaviour of the rulers, the Namdhari Sikhs alone performed *Akhand paths* and meditated in the name of God:

> Formerly, I was of opinion that Sikhs (not Kukas) and *Sadhs* entertained enmity and hatred towards us but, brethren, they likewise have the order of the Guru Ji, *gyani, dhyani, guni, dhanad, raja nam japat ghar ghar me adh* (theologists,

> prophets, believers, artisans, wealthy people and kings can all be estimated by their conduct in the worship of God). All who at every opportunity wrangle with those who recite the *Nam* are the accursed of some previous birth, they are not accountable for their conduct; it is all the doing of the Creator; they babble whatever enters their minds.[45]

Namdhari Guru Ram Singh knew that the founders of the Singh Sabha were wealthy people. He also knew that these founders established the Singh Sabha in response to his organisation. According to him, these people thought that if poor Kukas could be successful in running a movement why couldn't they, since they had the support of influential persons? However, Namdhari Guru Ram Singh believed that without Guru's grace nobody could think of success. The leaders of Singh Sabhas, according to him, did not enjoy that grace. The Namdhari Guru was confident that so long as the Namdhari Sikhs existed, these leaders would not make progress because the Namdharis Sikhs personified fire and it was dangerous to play with fire. In the wake of existing antagonism between the Namdhari Sikhs and these leaders, Namdhari Guru Ram Singh gave two options to the latter; either they should join Kuka Panth or remove it. It may be mentioned here that by the time Namdhari Sikhs posed a serious threat to the British Raj, the British had brought up a powerful class of its allies by way of synchronising their vested interests with the Raj. We have already stated the background of these allies comprising Sikh notable families, *sants* and *babas*, *mahants* and *pujaris*. Among the notable Sikh families were Majithia, Ahluwalia, Sandhanwalia and Ramgarhia. Powerful religious leaders were Baba Khem Singh Bedi in Rawalpindi, Bedis of Una and Dera Baba Nanak, Sodhis of Anandpur, Kartarpur and Guru Harsahai (Ferozepur) and Bagarian family in Malwa region. Similarly, *mahants* and *pujaris* occupied the important historical gurdwaras and prospered on the landed property attached

to these gurdwaras. The British had established their stranglehold over the landed aristocracy as well as priestly classes. The British enrolled them as the members of Darbars of Lieutenant Governor and Viceroy; made them Extra-Assist Commissioners and Honorary Magistrates. They were rewarded with *jagirs*, pensions and letters of appreciation for rendering loyal services to the Raj. Those who were in financial crisis, their estates were looked after by the government itself. Similarly, the priestly class was also patronised by the British in terms of assigning land-squares and *inams*. *Mahants* and *pujaris* were allowed to register the gurdwara-landed property against their names. Moreover, *mahants* and *pujaris* of historical gurdwaras were put under *Sarbrah* who was nominated by the government and accountable to the Deputy Commissioner alone. When Namdhari Guru Ram Singh was taunting the *pujaris* that they had the support of big people he was referring to this development. The Namdhari Guru was conscious of the fact that his adversaries had the potential to destroy the Namdhari mission. Success of protagonists of the Singh Sabhas depended upon the marginalisation of the Namdhari Sikhs. It is irony of history that these protagonists did succeed in marginalising the Namdhari movement.

Namdhari Guru Ram Singh questioned the authority of the *mahants* and *pujaris* for issuing *hukamnamas* against him and his followers. According to him, they had no moral authority to issue such *hukamnamas* against those who were carrying on a divine mission. The Namdhari Guru argued that issuing *hukamnama* against Guru's creation was tantamount to issuing *hukamnama* against Guru Himself. He challenged the *pujaris* that if they were morally powerful they could vanquish the Kukas otherwise they should regret over their actions. He reminded them that they had already done a considerable damage to him and his followers. Now it was the turn of the *pujaris* and their supporters to face the consequences as he expected an upheaval in Punjab. He

further told them that they should take his word seriously. He asked the *pujaris* of the Akal Bunga to circulate his letter among the rest of the *pujaris* of other *Takhats* (temporal institutions of the Sikh community) and the supporters.[46]

The Namdhari Guru told the *pujaris* that he could challenge their authority earlier too but he thought that they would themselves see the truth. He found that they suffered from myopia and failed to distinguish truth from falsehood. It was due to their ignorance that they disallowed Kukas to pay their homage in the gurdwaras and perform *ardas* on their behalf. He regretted to know that Kukas were insulted and beaten up by the *pujaris* on several occasions. If Kukas dared to question the *pujaris,* they told that they were acting according to the *hukamnama* issued by the head priest of the Akal Bunga. The Namdhari Guru reminded the *pujaris* that they should not have acted against the Kukas in a hurry because only devils acted in that manner.[47]

The Namdhari Guru knew that the *mahants* and *pujaris* were not alone in acting against the Kukas. They had the support of Sikh chiefs, *Sardars* and leaders of Singh Sabhas, who were bent upon eliminating Kukas on the allegation that their Guru was reciting *kalama*— the Islamic fundamental. The Namdhari Guru reiterated that he and his followers believed and worshipped Granth Sahib and Dasam Granth alone. They also obeyed the *hukam* of the ten masters and recite *gurmantar.* He also argued that the Kukas were those persons who believed that Sikhism was nothing but a belief in *guru shabad.* How could these persons be declared *tankhayias?* The Namdhari Guru told the *pujaris* that their actual intention was to give bad name to the Kukas.[48] He understood the motives of the Sikh landed aristocracy, priestly class, Singh Sabhaites and the British who systematically promoted loyalist culture on the one hand and were eliminating Kukaism on the other hand.

The British Government got several reports which purported the political motives of Namdhari Guru Ram

Singh who according to them want to drive the British out of the country and re-establish the Khalsa Raj. The police reports further stated that he was mobilising thousands of his followers and imparting them martial skills for that struggle. He was also building contacts with the native rulers of Jammu, Nepal and Russia in Central Asia. Moreover, he had built up a network of *Subas* and *Jathedars* and a private postal system for keeping secrecy of his political designs. The destruction of tombs and graveyards; confrontation at Tharajwala and attacks on the butchers of Amritsar and Malerkotla were reported as acts of insurgency of the Kuka Sikhs.

Nevertheless, the critics of the Namdhari guru and his movement argued that political overtones of his message were actually exaggerated fears and apprehensions of the British civil and police officials. They were so scared of the Kukas that they crushed Kuka's movement ruthlessly and deported Namdhari Guru Ram Singh to Rangoon. However, the letters written by the Namdhari Guru from abroad clearly show that fears of the British officials were not notional. In his letters, he corroborates his political concerns. In one of his letters he reiterated his faith in the prophesies of Sau-Sakhis.

> Oh Khalsa! Witness the doings and the workings of the Creator and see what He brings forth. Since my arrival here, I have, through the Grace of the Guru Sahib, divined many of the interpretations of the Sakhis.... This is the Guru's order that in the beginning of the 34th year (3 April 1878), corresponds with 1st Chet 1935), disturbances will commence and the rebellion will take place in the different countries. Consider, O Khalsa! that disturbances have commenced in the 34th year (Russo-Turkish War). Hereafter all that had been predicted by the Sacha Padshah Kalghiwala (Guru Gobind Singh) would be fulfilled; rest assured of this. It is not necessary to write at length; you can understand for yourselves. All else predicted has

reference to the ruin and destruction of the rulers, the signs of the times dating from the 34th year. Briefly, all the sayings will be fulfilled. I always said that if anything transpired in 34, then all would come to pass. So, as predicted 34 has borne its fruits; in future look forward to the doings and the workings of God; see what he will disclose.[49]

In another letter, the congregation was told that true Guru and he himself would reappear in Punjab as ninety-seven years had elapsed. For Namdhari Guru Ram Singh Lahore was headquarters of *malechh*—British and *malechh Panth*—the allies of the Raj. It was from Lahore that tyranny was let loose. If Guru willed, an upheaval was going to erupt. Namdhari Guru Ram Singh was keen to know the political situation in the District Peshawar. He expected that Russia was going to move towards Kabul and asked his following to intimate these advances to him.[50] As noted earlier, Kuka Sikhs in Punjab were in high spirits when they heard that Maharaja Dalip Singh had declared himself the sovereign of Punjab and was coming back to Punjab. The Kuka Sikhs formed their deputation and proceeded to Bombay to receive the Maharaja. They also expected the Russian help. It was in this context that the Namdhari Guru was making queries. Moreover, he kept alive the hopes of his followers that he shall himself come back to Punjab. He said

> The brethren wrote enquiring when I would return. Khalsaji! I will return at the whisking of the broom (intended to mean the destruction of the Government). The brethren also enquired, in the case of a disturbance, where should they strike? In the case of a disturbance, all should combine, and after mature consideration, strike in the most befitting place; but the disturbance, at present, is far removed. Just now the fire is not in the flames; wood and fuel are simply being collected.[51]

Meanwhile, the Namdhari Guru kept the morale of his followers in high spirit. In the hour of crisis he told his followers to take refuge in the *nam-simran* and asked them to perform *bhogs* collectively and meditate in the name of God vigorously. He knew that the recitation of *gurbani* would not only inspire his followers but also maintain cohesion among them. He also kept alive the hope of ultimate success of the Sant Khalsa. He told his followers that time was not far off for the end of *malechh panth*. By the grace of God, hard time would soon be over. He predicted that

> rulers and subjects would all be grounded to powder like flour.... For the protection of the Sant Khalsa, a Mohammedan will appear from the West, and collect all, and eradicate the Malechas .... So we are the Sant Khalsa and we have suffered much and the times are ominous. His protection of the Sant Khalsa has been foretold, and no doubt such will be the case. The time for the removal of persecutions of Sadhs and kine has arrived.[52]

Briefly speaking, it is remarkable that the Namdhari Guru maintained the spirit of the 18th century *rahitnamas* in terms of evolving *maryada* on the one hand and meeting the political challenges on the other. He modified the *maryada* of these *rahitnamas* according to his contemporary situation. He reiterated the observation of the Sikh tradition of *nam-simran*, personal hygiene, ethics, honest means of livelihood and taking care of needy people; maintaining sexual morality and upholding the dignity and honour of women and abstaining from intoxicants (liquor, opium and snuff etc). However, his *maryada* made a departure from the genre of the 18th century *Rahitnamas* in terms of rejection of role of priestly classes and launching a tirade against their exploitation. His *maryada* also made a departure in terms of mode of dressing (white clothes) and mode of eating. The Kuka Sikhs were complete vegetarians. Moreover, the Namdhari Guru aimed at strengthening the Namdhari Sikhs

spiritually and physically in the wake of hostility of the British Raj and its allies. He and his followers challenged the socio-cultural and political hegemony of the Raj and its allies. In this context, he wrote a long letter which he addressed to the *mahants* and *pujaris* particularly those of Akal Bunga. He openly challenged the moral authority which was appropriated by the priestly classes and landed Sikh gentry for their vested interests.[53]

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8. M.M. Ahluwalia, *Kukas: The Freedom Fighters of Punjab*, Allied Publishers, 1965, p 169.
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11. Ibid.
12. M.M. Ahluwalia, pp 171-173.
13. Ibid.
14. Ganda Singh, *Kukian Di Vithia*, Punjabi University, Patiala, 2000 (reprint), p 264; Jaswinder Singh, *Sri Satguru Ram Singh Ji De Hukamname*, Namdhari Darbar Bhaini Sahib, 1998, pp 51-52.
15. "We are all well and happy, and desire the welfare and happiness of all from the Great one. O Khalsa! we have no other discomfort, but the great discomfort of separation from the brethren (sangat). This affliction can only be removed by the Guru Sahib : when it pleases him to do so, he will do it in an-instant": Jaswinder Singh, *Kuka Movement: Freedom Struggle in Punjab*, Atlantic Publishers and

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35. Ibid, also see, *Rahitnama* cited by Tara Singh Aryan, pp 65-66.
36. W.H. McLeod, pp 105, 128-29.
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38. For the contrast between the life-style of the Khalsa of 18th century and Maharaja Ranjit Singh, his successors and Khalsa Fauj, see, Hari Ram Gupta, *History of the Sikhs*, Vol. V&VI, 1991; Khushwant Singh, *History of the Sikhs*, O.U.P., 1999.
39. Jaswinder Singh, 1998, pp 157-58.
40. *'gur ka Sikh hovai turkani sath judh na kare'* (Chaupa Singh Rahitnama). Subsequently, the word *judh* was supplanted by *sang*. Similarly

sexual intercourse with Muslim woman was stated as this intercourse with woman other than wife: see, W.H. McLeod, pp 224-25.

41. Jaswinder Singh, 1998, pp 384-85.
42. Doris R. Jakobsh, p 110.
43. Jaswinder Singh, 1998, pp 391-92.
44. Jaswinder Singh, 1998, p 120.
45. Jaswinder Singh, Kuka Movement: Freedom Struggle in Punjab, pp 34-35.
46. Namdhari Guru Ram Singh's letter to the Pujaris of Akal Bunga: Jaswinder Singh, 1998, pp 469-85.
47. Ibid.
48. Ibid.
49. Cited in M. M. Ahluwalia, p 139.
50. Jaswinder Singh, 1998, pp 182, 216, 290, 361, 374-75.
51. Cited by M. M. Ahluwalia, pp 139-40.
52. M. M. Ahluwalia, p 140.
53. Namdhari Guru wished that all the letters written by him to the pujaris should be preserved in the form of *pothi*. He instructed his follower Bhai Narain Singh to get these letters rewritten by an expert in gurmukhi letters but without making any amendment in the text of these letters. He also wanted that Bhai Narain Singh should take these letters to the pujaris of Takhats Amritsar and Patna.

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6

REMEMBERING NAMDHARI GURU RAM SINGH: A NAMDHARI PERSPECTIVE

When their Satguru Ram Singh was deported in 1872, the Namdhari writers worked out a mechanism to defend the beliefs and practices of their *gur-bhais* (co-religionists) from the British and their allies who had resolved to marginalise Kukaism among the Sikhs. They wrote Sakhis of their Satguru and *gathas* (heroic deeds) of the Kuka Singhs who had laid down their lives during the Kuka movement in the last quarter of the 19th century. Earliest among these writers were Sant Chanda Singh, Baba Kahla Singh, Sant Dhian Singh Kadrabadi, Sant Santokh Singh and Sant Nidhan Singh Alam. They had the privilege to serve their Satgurus Hari Singh and Partap Singh and stayed at Bhaini Sahib headquarters. They had access to those Kuka Singhs who were close associates of Namdhari Guru Ram Singh and recorded their oral accounts. They also recorded sayings of their Satgurus and the information provided by them on several incidents. In addition to eulogising their Satgurus and building up a spiritual hallow around them, these writers stated attributes of Namdhari *maryada* vis-i-vis prevalence of social evils. Some of them wrote *Bara-mahas* and others *Satguru bilas* which pertain to late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Namdhari writer Tara Singh Anjan edited *Bara-mahas* of seven writers. The *Bara-mahas* of Baba Chanda Singh, Sant Nihal Singh and Kala Singh pertain to late 19th and early 20th centuries whereas *Bara-mahas* of Suba Mihan Singh,

Sant Teja Singh Sukhal, Sant Iqbal Singh and Chattar Singh Bhoir pertain to mid 20th century.[1] Similarly, *Satguru Bilas* of Santokh Singh Kadrabadi and of Santokh Singh Bahowal were written during the period of Namdhari Gurus Hari Singh (1872-1906) and Partap Singh (1906-1959).

The *Bara-maha* "is a form of folk poetry in which the emotions and yearnings of the human heart are expressed in terms of changing moods of nature over the twelve months of the year. In this form of poetry, the mood of nature in each particular month (of the Indian calendar) depicts the inner agony of the human heart which in most cases happens to be a woman separated from her spouse or lover."[2] In case of the Namdhari *Bara-maha* it is the narrative of pangs felt by the Namdhari followers due to their separation from Namdhari Guru Ram Singh. In 1872, British deported Namdhari Guru to Mormoi, Burma (now Myanmar). Tara Singh Anjan cites a number of couplets of the Namdhari writers that articulated these pangs. The distinction of Baba Chanda Singh's *Bara-maha* lies in the fact that he compares the emotional sufferings of Namdhari followers with the people of Ajodhya when Lord Ram left for *banvas* (exile). Lord Ram underwent emotional stress. His brother Bharat had to look after the state affairs of Ajodhya in the absence of Lord Ram. Similar was the position of Jassa Singh, father, and Hari Singh, brother of Satguru Ram Singh. They too underwent emotional stress. Hari Singh had to look after the affairs of Bhaini Sahib in the absence of Satguru Ram Singh.[3]

The scope of the Namdhari *Bara-mahas* is wider than merely the narrative of pangs of separation felt by Namdhari Gurus and their followers. These *Bara-mahas* reiterate the popular concept of incarnation of God in human forms. Most of the Sikhs of 19th century Punjab believed that the Sikh Gurus were *avtars*. They received Hindu mythology of Gods

and Goddesses particularly theory of incarnation from the Sikh literature and scriptures of 17th and 18th centuries. For instance, they held Dasam Granth in high esteem. For Namdhari Guru Ram Singh this *Granth* was a 'scripture'. Its compositions have references to Hindu mythology including the role of *devi* in founding of the Khalsa. The concept of incarnation of God in human form is explicitly stated in *Bachittar Natak, Chandi Charitar, Chaubis Avatar, Brahma Avtar* and *Rudra Avatar* of the Dasam Granth.[4] As noted earlier too, Giani Gian Singh in his work *Panth Parkash* perceived Namdhari Gurus Balak Singh and Ram Singh as *avtars*. Subsequently, the Namdhari writers too perceived their Satgurus as *avtars*. They further believed and advocated that Satgurus appeared in this world to liberate humanity from its mundane desires and temptations. As *avtar*, Krishan, came to finish Kans, Satguru Ram Singh aimed to finish the tyrant British.[5] Posing Namdhari Guru as the reincarnation of God and protagonist of righteous cause on the one hand and projecting the British as the tyrant on the other, the Namdhari writers adopted a traditional strategy to keep morale of the Namdhari Sikhs high in the absence of Namdhari Guru Ram Singh. Moreover, the Namdhari writers, being aware of the Sikh tradition, extended the use of this tradition to the formation of Sant Khalsa (1857) by Namdhari Guru Ram Singh. As Guru Gobind Singh's Khalsa fought for righteous cause, so did the Sant Khalsa of Namdhari Guru Ram Singh.

Psychologically the authors of *Bara-mahas* refused to surrender before the military might of the British. Rather they portray the Kukas as fearless Singhs who knew how to wield the sword against tyrants and lay down their lives for the religious cause. The Kukas were inspired by their Satgurus who told them that it was *Akal Purakh* who is the ultimate authority. They were accountable to the *Akal Purakh* alone. They recited *shabad* in praise of Satguru and *Akal Purakh* for transcending the fear of worldly-authority i.e. the British. Similarly, they were not scared of supernatural

powers which were often displayed by *pirs* and *babas*. The common people bowed before them. Having faith in the powers of *Akal Purakh*, the Kukas demolished graveyards and tombs. They demonstrated the hollowness of the evil spirits which were source of supernatural powers for the common people. The fearlessness of the Kuka Singhs created awe among the people and the British. The latter were taken aback to note that Kuka Singhs had scant regard for the British authority.[6]

The Namdhari *Bara-mahas* highlighted Kukas' confrontation with the British on the issue of slaughter of cows. These *Bara-mahas* accuse *malechh* who came from London and established slaughter houses here. "Satguru Ram Singh and Kuka Singhs were pained to know this thing. For them it was intolerable to see the opening of slaughter houses. It was their religious obligation to protect cow. For that cause, they were prepared to lay down their lives. They attacked butchers and killed them. For demonstrating their heroic deeds, the British promptly punished them. Unjustly, Satguru Ram Singh was deported. Although the Kuka Singhs and their guru suffered pangs of separation yet they did not lose faith in the destiny. The *Bara-mahas* tell us that the Kuka Singhs hoped that their Satguru would come back to Punjab and raise a banner of new rule. Moreover, Satguru and Kuka Singhs hoped that the Russian forces and Pathans would attack Punjab and there would be a hue and cry in London. In the fierce battle, the sons of mothers shall perish. There would be draught leading to famine."[7]

Besides, the Namdhari *Bara-mahas* emphasise the uniqueness of the Namdhari Panth in terms of introduction of Namdhari *maryada* evolved by Namdhari Guru Ram Singh for both men and women. The Namdhari followers observed five *kakars*. They wore *dastar* (turban) and *mala* (woolen rosary). They got up in the last quarter of night and took full bath. They meditated in the name of God. They did not accept food and water from others. They abstained from meat,

tobacco and liquor. Moreover, they refrained from back-biting and spoke the truth. While reciting *shabad,* they transcended to the state of ecstasy and their turbans fell off on their shoulders. Besides, Sant Nihal Singh informs us that the Namdhari women observed *maryada.* They wore *kachh* and kept their hair loose.[8]

II

The Namdhari writers Sant Dhian Singh Kadrabadi and Santokh Singh Bahowal also kept alive the Sikh literary tradition of composing *Gurbilas* in both poetic and prose styles. The former composed *Sri Satguru Bilas Patshahi Barvin* (12th) and the latter *Satguru Bilas* in early years of the 20th century. Literally *Gurbilas* means 'pleasure of the guru'. Before Namdhari Guru Ram Singh,

> works composed in style concentrate on the mighty deeds of two gurus, Guru Hargobind and particularly Guru Gobind Singh. These were the two gurus renowned for their deeds of military valour and it is upon these gallant deeds that gurbilas writers typically concentrate. The piety represented by the gurbilas literature is distinctively different from the Janam-sakhis, emphasising as it does the heroic deeds of the warrior gurus.[9]

It is this tradition of valorising deeds of Sikh gurus and their piety which fascinated Namdhari writers. By following this genre, the latter could remember the status of their gurus in relation to gallant deeds and piety of Guru Hargobind and Guru Gobind Singh. The Namdhari writers could also show the continuity of embodied guru in Sikh tradition. The title *Sri Satguru Bilas Patshahi Barvin* (12th incarnation) in itself shows the intention of its author.

We can begin with the attributes of Namdhari *Gurbilas* literature as expressed by Inder Singh Chakarvarti and Amar

Bharati. The former edited *Sri Satguru Bilas Patshahi Barvin* and the latter wrote its foreward. It was republished by Namdhari Darbar Bhaini Sahib in 1998. Commenting upon the nature and scope of this *bilas*, Amar Bharati says that it reflects the Godly personality of Satguru Ram Singh; it states accounts of miracles; reflects dilemma of the Sikhs (Kuka), their doubts and fears. With blessings, vision and pragmatic approach of Satguru, the Sikhs were relieved of their fears, doubts and dilemmas. Kadrabadi's *bilas* narrates the attitude of Satguru towards his Sikhs and latter's obligations towards the society. Kadrabadi says that Satguru Ram Singh's ideal was Dasam Patshah Sri Satguru Gobind Singh in terms of emulating latter's mission and *maryada*. Moreover, his *bilas* also shows widespread popularity of Satguru Ram Singh. Kadrabadi contends that whenever, he undertook the pilgrimage of any historical gurdwara, thousands of people gathered over there for the glimpse of their Satguru. At the same time, this work underlines the hostility of the *pujaris* of the Akal Takhat towards Namdhari Guru and his Sikhs. These *pujaris*, according to Amar Bharti, unjustly declared Satguru Ram Singh *tankhayia* whereas, the *pujaris* and *granthis* of Sri Harmandir Sahib honoured him with robes of honour *(siropa)*.

According to Amar Bharati, *Gurbilas* of Dhian Singh is also important for it reflects psychological tensions between Satguru Ram Singh and his Sikhs on the issue of attack on Malerkotla (1872). The Kuka Singhs were determined to attack whereas their Guru perceived it as a premature act. Justifying Satguru Ram Singh's stance, Amar Bharati says that had these Sikhs seen the view point of Satguru, the course of history of Punjab albeit of India would have been different.

This work is a commentary on the formation of the Namdhari community and its resurgence. It is a *granth* reflecting the sensitivity, psychology and history of the Namdhari Sikhs. In this context it narrates pontification of

Satguru Ram Singh and his resolve to spread *nam-bani*. It contains the account of his pilgrimages, and *saka* (tragedy) of Malerkotla and the Guru's deportation to Burma. Having said that Amar Bharati says that this work is not basically a book of history. It is full of Satguru Ram Singh's miracles.

Being an ideologue of the Namdhari community, Inder Singh Chakarvarti begins his introduction articulating contemporary concerns and challenges which confronted this community. Appreciating the relevance of history, he regrets that the Namdhari Sikhs cannot take pride in having a work on Namdhari history. Chakarvarti's regret is justified as there was no historical work when the second edition *of Sri Satguru Bilas* was published in 1942.[10] Chakarvarti wrote its introduction. Nevertheless, his emphasis on recording the oral testimony of Satguru Ram Singh's contemporary Namdhari Sikhs, collection of his letters including official tracts and songs could be helpful for writing history of the Namdhari community.

Chakarvarti gives a brief introduction of Sant Dhian Singh Kadrabadi. He was born in 1853-54 and was son of Tirlok Singh Arora, a landlord in District Montgomery. Right from the beginning he was an introvert but participated in congregation held in a gurdwara. He learnt gurmukhi from Baba Charan Singh; Persian and Urdu from the village Jedpur. Moreover, he got training in reading the *Adi-Granth* and wanted to become *Pathi* (scripture reader) in Darbar Sahib. He was popular in his area for completing the *path* of *Adi-Granth* in a single sitting. He took *bhajan* from Namdhari Guru Hari Singh and served *dera* Bhaini Sahib as a devout Sikh. Moreover, he had the privilege of having been the tutor of Namdhari Guru Partap Singh (1906-1959).

Unlike Amar Bharati, Chakarvarti highlights the hagiographic importance of this work. Chakarvarti says that Dhian Singh Kadrabadi wrote this *bilas* for singing the praise of Satgurus. His invokation *(mangla-charan)* begins with Guru Nanak and ends with Guru Hari Singh. By implication he

reiterates the continuity of guruship. Apart from the *mangla-charan* of these gurus, he portrays the physical features of Satguru Ram Singh. Chakarvarti quotes verses of this *bilas* in this context. Besides, Chakarvarti highlights its literary merits which were composed in *Brajbhasha*. It is remarkable that Kadrabadi often synthesised *gurbani* with his verses.

Sant Dhian Singh Kadrabadi tells us that Satguru Ram Singh wanted to introduce Guru Gobind Singh's *reet*. He deputed Rai Singh to go to Nanded and note down Guru's *reet*. Kadrabadi gives a brief reference to the difficulties faced by Rai Singh to reach Nanded. He narrates the stories that how Satguru Ram Singh saved his Sikh from the dangers to his life. However, the *reet* noted by Rai Singh is similar to the *rahit* stated in the *rahitnamas* of the 18th century. For instance, the *rahitnamas* ordain their followers to maintain five *kakars*, abstain from meet diet, liquor and tobacco and refrain from sexual intercourse with Turkani, Muslim woman. Like *rahitnamas, reet* stated by Rai Singh, emphasises on *isnan* (bath) and *nam-simran*. Unlike in *rahitnamas*, he gives special emphasis on *sidhi-dastar*, strait turban. The Namdhari Sikhs were known for this type of turban, and woollen, rosary and reciting *shabad* with *dholki* and *chhehen* (drum and cymbals) and reaching to the state of ecstasy. They became *mastanas*. Moreover, Rai Singh's statement on *reet* also refers to four types of *tankhahias:* cutting hairs, intercourse with Turkani, cow killing and use of tobacco. Another distinction of the Namdhari Guru and Sikhs depicted by Kadrabadi was that they revived the tradition of holding collective congregation for reciting *shabad* and performing *katha*. They also organised *langar* for the congregation.[11]

Sant Nidhan Singh holds Namdhari Gurus and Sikhs in high esteem for their high moral and ethical values. They were struggling to get the people free from the contemporary social evils: theft, illicit relations and practice of telling lies etc. Then Sant Nidhan Singh brings an element of discordance when he states that the British officials were

impressed by the godly characters of Namdhari Gurus and his followers. Satguru Ram Singh, being the paragon of religious and ethical values, the British respected him. The British officials were also impressed by the royal style of Satguru Ram Singh riding horse and leading the procession of his followers. When he and his followers paid homage to Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, the local officials made the city neat and clean!!! Thousands of people gathered to see the glow of the Namdhari Guru and Sikhs who moved slowly while singing *shabad*. Nevertheless, the *pujaris* of Akal Takhat couldn't appreciate Satguru. They refused to accept his offerings and declared him *tankhahia* on the ground that his followers showed disrespect to the *kesh* when their turbans fell of. However, the priests of Darbar Sahib accepted his offerings and honoured him with *dastar, doshala* and ten balls of *misri* (sugar-balls). Satguru accepted only the last mentioned but alleged that the *pujaris* of the Akal Takhat were themselves corrupt and indulged into immoral practices.[12]

For Nidhan Singh, an attack on the butchers of Amritsar and Malerkotla was an irrational act of the Kuka Singhs. For justification of Namdhari Guru's argument, he devotes some space for a dialogue among the Kuka Singhs and Satguru Ram Singh. The Kuka Singhs were convinced that cow-killing was an irreligious act. They were pained to know that butchers were inflicting pains on the cows. They approached their Satguru and explained their wounded psyche. They sought Satguru's permission to eliminate these tyrants. However, Satguru asked them to wait for some appropriate time. Having lost their patience, they resolved to attack these tyrants. The Satguru tried to prevail upon the Mastana Singhs, but when he failed, he reported to the nearby police officials that some Mastana Singhs were beyond his control. On the other hand, Inder Singh Chakarvarti calls this development as an episode. It was the will of God that *mastanas* were to lay down their lives in that manner. They

were heroes who carried on the tradition of *shaheedi*. Chakarvarti devotes space for defining the attributes of *Sikhi*. He defines the attributes with reference to teachings of Sikh Gurus and *Bhagats*. The *Sikhi* comprises both spiritual and temporal power. Chakarvarti believes that *Sikhi* is the name of sacrifice. Only the fortunate adopts *Sikhi*. These Sikhs laid down their lives in the *saka* of Malerkotla, Chakarvarti declares them *shaheeds*.[13]

In the end, Chakarvarti briefly refers to the resurgence of Namdhari Sikhs under the leadership of Satguru Ram Singh who possessed sixteen attributes (*sampuran kalan)* of *Ishvar* (God).[14] In reaction to the *saka* of Malerkotla, the British sent its force to besiege dera Bhaini Sahib and arrest Satguru. The attitude of the forces was quite aggressive as it threatened to blow up Bhaini Sahib. The besiege created panic among the Sikhs. When their Satguru was arrested, they became sad. Then Satguru instructed them to compose themselves and engage in meditation and perform *Akhand Paths*. He further told them to repose faith in God and be fearless. Moreover, he told them that his arrest should be treated as the will of God. At the same time, Chakarvarti describes Satguru's deportation a fortunate development for the natives of Rangoon. Satguru introduced the Khalsa Panth over there. Several people became Singhs due to the Satgurus' charisma. Since several followers from Punjab too went there to see their Satguru, the British moved him to Mormoi. Even there the Sikhs continued to have his *darshan*. They started reciting *bani*. Lastly from Mormoi, Satguru wrote a letter to the congregation of *Dera* Bhaini Sahib to acknowledge Budh Singh, his successor, and carry on their religious life. The Satguru told them that those who will observe his instructions shall be blessed by God in this and next world. The Satguru wished that only *bhajan* shall bestow *anand*—spiritual satisfaction in his absence.[15]

Santokh Singh Bahowal also wrote *Satguru Bilas*. He himself did not say anything about his date of birth and place

and parentage in his work. Nor did he state the location of his village Bahowal whether it was in the District Gurdaspur or Hoshiarpur. By caste, he was Kalal.[16] After many wanderings for spiritual quest, he came to Bhaini Sahib and settled here for the rest of his life. During his stay at this *dera*, he looked after animals and collected firewood for the kitchen. He gave up his attire of a Nihang and styled himself as Namdhari Sikh on Satguru Hari Singh's advice. The latter also administered *bhajan* to him. He was fascinated by the Namdhari spiritual master and heroic anecdotes of the Kuka 'Singhs'. He wrote down the *sakhian* (stories) which were narrated to him by Satguru Hari Singh himself and his associates and associates of Satguru Ram Singh. These associates were Nanu Singh, personal attendant of Satguru Ram Singh and Suba Kahn Singh. He also recorded some information from the work of Chhauka Ram, a contemporary poet of Hazro.[17] On the basis of these sources (largely oral) he wrote a manuscript which Jaswinder Singh places between period 1882 to 1906. According to him it is the first *gurbilas* in Punjabi prose which provides information about the social background of Satguru Ram Singh; his services in the Khalsa army and formation of the Sant Khalsa. Jaswinder Singh also finds that information given by Santokh Singh is reliable partly because it was certified by Satguru Hari Singh himself and partly because its information can be verified against the official documents. Nevertheless, Santokh Singh's *granth* did not reach us in the form as he wrote it. He wrote according to the wishes of his Satguru Hari Singh. Subsequently, Namdhari Guru Partap Singh also got this manuscript vetted and was re-written by Balwant Singh handsomely. The *granth* was titled *Satguru Bilas*, splendour of Namdhari Guru. Nevertheless, Santokh Singh reiterates the attributes of generic of *Gurbilas* literature, narrating miracles and lifestyle of the Namdhari Gurus and history. He narrates the splendour of the Namdhari Gurus in the context of *Sanatan* traditions of Sikhism which often refer to

the Hindu *avtars*, gods and goddesses.[18]

For the Namdhari writers and leaders, this *granth* is relevant for the following reasons. Harvindra Singh Hanspal, President, Namdhari Darbar, perceives its relevance in terms of *gur-gatha*, story of the Namdhari Gurus. The story unfolds accounts of Satguru Ram Singh and Satguru Hari Singh, miracles performed by them; accounts of blessings showered by them on their devout followers, accounts of incidents in which hundreds of men and women were involved; accounts of rise of Namdhari movement articulating anti-British sentiments and patriotism of the Namdhari Sikhs and their martyrdom for the struggle for independence. Hanspal further states that the second volume is replete with the excesses committed by the British officials on the Namdhari Singhs since the British and its allies were determined to marginalise the Namdhari movement. Similarly, editor of *Satguru Bilas*, Jaswinder Singh, highlights its literary and historical relevance. He tells us that the author Santokh Singh made serious efforts in terms of recording *sakhian* stated by the contemporary Namdhari Sikhs and close associates of Satguru Ram Singh. It is only this *granth* which furnishes information on the years from Ram Singh's birth to A.D. 1863. Jaswinder Singh also brings out certain omissions in this *granth*.

Although this assessment is fairly good yet the relevance of this *granth*, is more significant in terms of the Namdhari Sikhs becoming *a panth*. Santokh Singh says that Satguru Ram Singh founded *teesra* (third) *panth* but without referring to two other *panths*. Most probably, he wanted to emphasise the distinct Namdhari identity which implies that the Namdhari *panth* made a departure in regard to those Sikh doctrines and beliefs and practices of 19th century Punjab which were advocated by his contemporary *mahants* and *pujaris* on the one hand and Sikh scholars of the Singh Sabha movement on the other.

Santokh Singh wrote two poems summarising the main

contents of his *granth* and pre-fixed the same to it. He did this exercise for telling the people that he could write poems also. However, the relevance of these short poems lies in the fact that he reiterates Guru Balak Singh and Guru Ram Singh as the eleventh and twelfth Gurus respectively. He invokes God who has created this Universe and is manifest in the Vedic and Puranic scriptures and also visible in the text of *Japuji*. Being the 12th Guru, Ram Singh came to play *avtar leela* (God's game): it was service of Lahore (Darbar) which sent him to Hazro, he took *updesh* and became true master and then took to agriculture and business, appointed *subas* for the spread of *dharma* and got graves demolished; Malerkotla attacked and eliminated butchers; handed *panth* (Namdhari Sangat) over to his brother and got himself exiled. Santokh Singh hopes that Satguru Ram Singh would appear once again.

Satguru Bilas informs us that when Satguru Ram Singh left for Rangoon, his brother Budh Singh performed his socio-religious activities and administered affairs of the *dera* in the name of Satguru Ram Singh. Santokh Singh refers to several occasions when Budh Singh publicly told the *sangat* that it was not he but Ram Singh who was the real Satguru. In fact, there was some opposition to him from within the *dera*. The local officials and Bibi Attari and Bibi Nanda did not give due recognition to Hari Singh as the Namdhari Guru. In the text of the first volume of *Satguru Bilas*, Satguru Ram Singh's personality overshadows Hari Singh's image. However, the second volume of his *bilas* shows that Namdhari Guru Hari Singh consolidated his authority over the affairs of the *dera* and took tours of distant places for the Namdhari mission. He organised a *jatha* comprising *granihis*, *ragis* and *dhadis* for propagation. He also took several decisions regarding the expansion of the *dera* and *sangat*. Moreover, *Satguru Bilas* raised his spiritual status as he could perform miracles. *Satguru Bilas* tells us that Satguru Hari Singh revived the dead persons and with his blessings patients recovered from

their illness. He also saved his devotees from crises. Above all, *Satguru Bilas* declared him the messenger of *Akal Purakh.* Gradually, *Satguru Bilas* elevated the status of Hari Singh to the true-guru. For these reasons the author of this *bilas* constructs stories of futurology.[19]

Santokh Singh's work shows that during Namdhari Guru Ram Singh's time, the devout followers began to construct myths around the personalities of their gurus. Some of these myths are found in the *Bara-maha* literature also. Following the pattern of *Janam-Sakhi* literature Santokh Singh constructs Sakhis narrating the physical and spiritual qualities of Namdhari Gurus which they required by the grace of God. The Namdhari Gurus were messengers of God. Santokh Singh perceives the birth of Satguru Ram Singh as an extraordinary event. His birth could remove the mundane burden. The angels descended on the earth and placed their heads at the feet of this child and they went back to heavens. There was a joy in the worlds. For the author, his (Ram Singh's) birth would dispel ignorance and sins as the sun dispels darkness. Here the author borrows Bhai Gurdas's metaphor about Guru Nanak's birth which dispelled ignorance and enlightened the world. Santokh Singh says that on Satguru Ram Singh's birth God Himself appeared on the earth. He was both in *nirgun* and *sargun* forms of God. The parents of the child, nurse and the people of his village thought that God Himself had blessed the child with the supernatural powers: Satguru Ram Singh could utter and recite 35 letters of gurmukhi script when he was hardly five years old.[20]

Santokh Singh narrates Satguru Ram Singh's dream which shows his divine mission. In his dream, Satguru found himself in the *dargah* (court) of the *Akal Purakh.* The latter told him that he was 12th *avtar* and *guru of gurus.* The *Akal Purakh* disclosed that he deputed several gurus for the propagation of *nam-simran* in the world. But instead of performing that task, each of them evolved their own *sharaas,*

(codes of conduct). Moreover, they became egoists and formed their respective sects. None of them remembered Him (*Akal Purakh*). Therefore, he had to recall them back. Now it was his (Ram Singh) turn to perform the pending task of propagation of *Nam* and to encourage the people to meditate in the *Nam* of *Akal Purakh*. Before sending him to this world *Akal Purakh* blessed Ram Singh that he Himself *(Akal Purakh)* would be present among those people to whom he (Ram Singh) would administer *gurmantra*. *Akal Purakh* further told him that he should go back to the world and liberate mother-earth from its burden; save cows being slaughtered and liberate sinners.

Equipped with supernatural powers, Satguru Ram Singh could fly over from one distant place to another within a twinkle of eyes. He and his associate Kahn Singh left their army headquarters without taking a formal permission. They were at the distance of 12 *kos* (24 miles) when Kahn Singh remembered the urgency of their presence at the time of roll-call otherwise they could be declared absentees. Satguru simply asked Kahn Singh to shut his eyes. In the next moment when he opened his eyes, he and his Satguru found themselves amidst their army-personnel. With his supernatural powers, Namdhari Guru Ram Singh changed iron vessels into the golden vessels. He saved several people from being falling into the death trap and saved a woman and her son from being burnt up. He could restore health to the people suffering from diseases like leprosy. At the same time, he cursed *malechh* (Turks) and *malechh* Khalsa for their immoral practices. Even he cursed his associate Lehna Singh who did not help Satguru in picking up a sheaf of crop. Consequently, Lehna Singh, first lost his wife and then his bullocks. Such loss amounted to the loss of livelihood and family. In telling such stories, Santokh Singh tries to establish the spiritual authority of his Satguru over the ordinary human mortals. The contemporary religious leaders were no match to the supernatural powers of Satguru Ram Singh.[21]

For providing legitimacy to the Sant Khalsa by Satguru Ram Singh, Santokh Singh draws parallels between this Khalsa and of Guru Gobind Singh's Khalsa. He concludes that if Guru Gobind Singh formed Khalsa to supplant *Masands*, Satguru Ram Singh formed Sant Khalsa to supplant *malechh* Khalsa of the 19th century. He says that Satguru instructed his five beloved *panj-piaras* to observe Guru Gobind Singh's *reeti*.[22] According to Santokh Singh, Satguru guarded his *maryada* zealously and rigorously. He ensured that those who took *Nam* should follow his *maryada* scrupulously. Those who showed laxity were punished severally. Some of these people were beaten by him.

Satgurus' attitude towards his contemporary religious leaders was aggressive. In Santokh Singh's text, these leaders comprised Nirmala Sadhus, Nihangs and Ram Rais. Satguru felt offended by their lifestyle as they wandered from one place to another. If at all they stayed at a place, they opted to stay outside of a village or town, expecting that the local people should come and pay homage and offerings to them. Some of them performed witchcraft. They neither meditated in the name of God nor propagated *gurbani*. Whenever, Satguru Ram Singh came across the so-called religious leaders, he exposed their immoral practices and in certain cases, beat them. Satgurus' uncompromising attitude gave the message to the people that they should not follow parasites.[23]

In Santokh Singh's account, Satguru Ram Singh and Namdhari Singhs emerge victorious in their encounters with the Sodhis of Anandpur, *Pujaris* of Akal Takhat Amritsar and Mukatsar. On more than one occasion, Satguru Ram Singh and his followers undertook the pilgrimage of Sikh historical gurdwaras where they held dialogue with the Sodhis and *Pujaris*. Santokh Singh's account gives details of charges levelled by the priests of these gurdwaras. These charges were refuted by Namdhari Guru. His account also informs us that Namdhari Guru and Kuka Singhs not only defended

their position but also encountered their arguments saying that *Mahants* and *Pujaris* used liquor and tobacco. Whereas, the Namdhari Guru and Kuka Singhs were devout Sikhs following the *reeti* of Guru Gobind Singh. They recited *gurbani* throughout the day and performed *Akhand Paths*. Santokh Singh contends that the Namdhari Singhs were real and superior Singhs than their counterparts. Some of the Sodhis and *Mahants* became pro-Namdhari Sikhs and the *ferangee* officials espoused the cause of the Namdhari Guru.[24]

The *Satguru Bilas* throws light on the relationship between the British Government and the Namdhari Guru and Sikhs. According to its account, Satguru Ram Singh was free to propagate his mission till 1863. Then the British officials kept a close watch on his activities. After the incident of violence they put him into the house arrest and deported him to Rangoon subsequently. For its arbitrary action, the British government put entire onus on the Sikh *Sardars*, Chiefs, *mahants* and *pujaris*. Similarly, when Namdhari Guru Ram Singh asked government to send him back to Punjab, the jail officials told him that above mentioned Sikhs opposed this idea on the ground that he (Ram Singh) would create disorder. Santokh Singh's account further tells us that such opposition continued when Hari Singh became *Sir-Karta* of the Namdhari *Panth*. However, his account states comprehensively the nature of restrictions and repression let loose by the British government on the Namdhari Sikhs. Nevertheless, towards the end of the 19th century, the attitude of the local officials softened towards Namdhari Guru Hari Singh and his followers. For instance, they allowed him to undertake tours of villages and towns for propagating his mission and performing the Namdhari rituals and ceremonies. Santokh Singh cites a number of cases when the Namdhari Guru and his associates approached police officials for resolving criminal and civil cases. In certain cases, the British officials were pleased by the good conduct of the Namdhari Sikhs in regard to the propagation

of *gurbani* and service of *langar* to the needy people during the draught years.[25]

There are some references to the Singh Sabhas and their limited interaction with the Namdhari Sikhs. The former questioned some of the beliefs and practices of the Namdhari Sikhs whereas the latter questioned the loyalty of the Singh Sabhas to the government which continued even in the wake of continuity of its policy of cow-slaughter. Besides, Santokh Singh argues that the Namdharis were better Sikhs in terms of administering *amrit* to the women and *ragis* who performed *kirtan*.[26]

Briefly speaking according to *Bara-maha* and *Gurbilas* literature the Namdhari Sikhs constituted *teesra panth* having its own lineage of guruship: Satgurus Balak Singh and Ram Singh as 11th and 12th *avtars*. They were the messengers of *Akal Purakh* who revived the Sikh practice of *nam-simran* and administering *gurmantar* and *amrit*. For illustrating these concepts, they quoted the *Adi-Granth*. Underlining the relevance of *gurmantar*, the Namdhari Gurus argued that a person without its initiation was useless. The *gurmantar* was essential for the spiritual growth of a human being. Nevertheless, the *Bara-maha* and *Satguru Bilas* literature do not give details of preparation of *amrit* by Namdhari Guru Ram Singh.[27] The literature also refers to the five *kakars* with special emphasis on *kachh* and *dastar*. Similarly, it refers to the prohibition of tobacco, liquor and adultery.

Thus Namdhari *Bara-maha* and *Satguru Bilas* confirm that Namdhari *maryada* related to the rituals of birth, *namakaran*, marriage and death, had come into being by the end of the 19th century. Similarly, these texts inform us about the construction of Namdhari *ardas* and *Akhand Path*. Jaswinder Singh, editor of *Satguru Bilas*, tells us that it was Satguru Hari Singh who ordered to include the names of Satguru Balak Singh and Satguru Ram Singh in the Sikh *ardas*. Subsequently, the names of their successors were added.[28] Besides, Santokh Singh's *granth* refers to three more new

attributes of Namdhari *maryada: Varni Jap Sahib ki, Mala di Varni* and *Bhagauti-di Mala.* Namdhari Guru Hari Singh also ordered to recite the name of his predecessor while performing *Bhagauti-di Mala.*[29]

By the end of 19th century, birth place of Satguru Ram Singh and his Sant Khalsa, Bhaini Arayian, a village, became religious headquarters and was called Ramdaspur. It became a *tap-asthan,* place of meditation. The institution of *langar* was started by Namdhari Guru Ram Singh himself. Subsequently, a pond of nectar (Dhian Singh also calls it Amritsar) was constructed. A dip in this *sarovar* could remove dust on the physique and restore purity of mind. The *Adi-Granth* was installed. Moreover, the headquarters was provided with well, *Kharas* (bullock-driven flour mill), and stable.

Chakarvarti and Alam studied the works of scholars of the 18th and 19th centuries and found that there was large scope of contextualising their beliefs and practices with reference to the works of Giani Gian Singh, Maha Kavi Santokh Singh, Koer Singh and Sukha Singh etc.

III

Inder Singh Chakarvarti and Nidhan Singh Alam wrote *Namdhari Ithas,* Part I in 1934 and the latter *Guru Pad Prakash* in 1935 respectively. Alam wrote two more volumes in 1938 and 1942 under the same title. One of the primary concerns of these two writers was to substantiate Namdhari faith in the continuity of gurushiip. Both perceived Namdhari Gurus Balak Singh and Ram Singh as 11th and 12th Gurus respectively. While putting forth their arguments, they wrote that Guru Gobind Singh disappeared from Nanded in a dramatic way in 1708, came to Punjab and stayed there in the person of Baba Ajaipal Singh and eventually vested gurushiip in 'Guru' Balak Singh and the latter vested it in

'Guru' Ram Singh. In response to these writings, Bhai Sewa Singh, editor, *Khalsa Samachar,* wrote a book *Guru Pad Nirne* which was published from Amritsar in 1934. Bhai Sewa Singh questioned the Namdhari hypothesis of continuity of guruship. Interestingly, Namdhari writers and Bhai Sewa Singh used common sources which comprised *Adi-Granth,* Dasam Granth, *Rahitnamas* and *Pothis* of the 18th and 19th centuries for substantiating their respective view-points.[30] The succession-theory propounded by Namdhari writers was seriously contested and rejected by Ganda Singh in his works *Kukian Di Vithia* (1944) and *Guru Gobind Singh's Death at Nanded and Examination of the Succession Theories.* Ganda Singh concluded that Guru Gobind Singh expired in 1708 and before his death he did not appoint his successor and commanded his followers to accept the holy book, the *Granth Sahib* as their Guru.[31] Subsequently, Namdhari writers tried to rebut his arguments.[32]

Accordingly these authors often advocated that the Sikh Gurus were incarnation of *Akal Purakh* or simply called them *avtars* or Guru Gobind Singh himself invoked goddess for creating Khalsa. *Avtars* figure in the *Puranic* literature prominently. In almost all the Puranas, there are a large number of legends. Bhai Santokh Singh and Giani Gian Singh specifically mention the theory of incarnation. Since there are references to the *avtars* (ten) in *gurbani,* they quoted some verses in regard to them. They perceived ten Sikh Gurus as ten *avtars* of *Akal Purakh.* Giani Gian Singh applied the same tradition to Namdhari Guru Ram Singh. He also called him 12th guru. Similarly, there are references to the Hindu beliefs and practices in the Sikh literature of the 18th and 19th centuries.[33]

In terms of the assertion that Satguru Ram Singh was incarnation of Guru Gobind Singh, Inder Singh Chakarvarti was more forthright. In 1935, he wrote a comprehensive introduction to the *Namdhari Nitnam* which was republished by the Manager of *"Satjug"*, Sri Jiwan Nagar, Hissar, 1957.

Chakarvarti used following appellation for God: *Akal Purakh* and *Ishvar Antarjami.* According to him, the depraved and degenerated conditions of mankind made it obligatory for the *Akal Purakh* to save humanity from the tyranny of the rulers. Amidst *adharam* (irreligiousness), *Akal Purakh* sent its messenger to save the helpless (sufferers) and explode the arrogance of the tyrants. The *bhagat* (messenger of *Akal Purakh)* appeared in the world for protecting the honour of his followers. The phenomenon of reincarnation, according to Chakarvarti, was not new. It had been occurring since ages.[34] He quoted Hindu mythology in which Lords Ram and Krishan appeared as *avtars* in *Treta* and *Do-appar.* In continuation of that, Guru Nanak and his successors till Guru Gobind Singh appeared in *kalyuga.* Chakarvarti gave justification for the appearance of Sikh Gurus especially Guru Nanak by quoting verses of Bhai Gurdas. It was a situation where *dharma* had taken wings and *koor* (falsehood) had overtaken the universe.[35] Chakarvarti explained the political condition of Guru Nanak's times in terms of prevalence of darkness due to the Muslim rule. Unwittingly, Chakarvarti took the stand point of traditional Sikh scholars of the 18th and 19th centuries who perceived conflict between the Sikhs and Muslim rulers in religious terms. Chakarvarti quoted from his book *Nanak Prakash* and argued that the Hindus were victims of Muslim rule. The Muslim rulers got the temples demolished and Hindus were thrown to the wild animals for eating. Moreover, the Muslim rulers dishonoured the Hindu women. Simultaneously, Chakarvarti quoted loot and plunder indulged in by Timur, Nadar Shah and Ahmed Shah Abdali.[36] It may be pointed out here that in 1930s, the communal politics had overtaken the secular politics due to the ramifications of the Communal Award (1932). The Sikhs of different religious affiliations were quite disturbed at the establishment of Muslim hegemony in the Punjab politics. The Namdhari Guru Partap Singh too took the initiative for the restoration of communal harmony and unity among the

Sikh sects and organised Guru Nanak Nam Leva Sarb Samperdai Conference.[37] So it is not strange to find out anti-Muslim communal refrain in the writings of Inder Singh Chakarvarti. However, there were some special reasons for which Chakarvarti quoted the works of Bhai Santokh Singh. The primary reason was that Santokh Singh represented those Sikh traditions of early 19th century which articulated Vedantic and Brahmanical influence. He did not perceive Sikhism and Hinduism in exclusive terms. Bhai Santokh Singh's perception suited the Namdhari scholars who believed that Guru Gobind Singh performed *havan* for invoking Goddess Naina Devi on the occasion of creating Khalsa in A.D. 1699. Inder Singh Chakarvarti quoted Bhai Santokh Singh to say that had Guru Gobind Singh not taken *avtar,* the Muslim scriptures might have supplanted the Vedic scriptures and the practice of *katha* of Ved and Puran. Moreover, *Zat* and *Varna* system might have disappeared. Guru Gobind Singh took birth to revive the *maryada* of *havan* and *yag*. Chakarvarti also quoted a verse of Bhai Gurdas of Behlo in this context. According to Chakarvarti, Guru Gobind Singh loved *yagya-havan* so much that he used *samagari* of worth of one and a quarter lakh of *damari* (a coin) for performing *havan* in front of the temple of Naina Devi. Chakarvarti quoted a long verse from the 6th edition of *Panth Prakash,* to show the relevance of a *havan* and concluded that Guru Gobind Singh reincarnated for reviving *yag-havan maryada* which became a model for his followers to emulate.[38] The *puratan* (veteran) Singhs performed the rituals of *havan* and *yag*. They personified high moral values and ethics and showed piety. They were *gianis* as well as warriors. They accepted contribution whatever the peasants could afford to pay. So long the Khalsa upheld these values, they ruled. Chakarvarti quoted Giani Gian Singh for depicting the image of real *Sikhi* on the one hand and depraved the Sikhi practised by the contemporary Sikhs on the other:[39] the Sikhs wore *tamba-tahmat,* instead of *kachh;* removed hairs from the legs

and face, cut moustaches and beard, took liquor, opium and smoked *huqqa*, kept concubines, indulged in immoral actions.

In response to the hypothesis that 'Baba' Ram Singh was a social reformer and his confrontation with the British was an accident, Nidhan Singh Alam wrote *Jug Paltaoo Satguru* in 1947 and argued that Satguru (Ram Singh) was a revolutionary who wanted to overthrow the whole might of the foreign rule and mobilised a mass movement against this rule and its allies. Sardul Singh Caveeshar, who wrote 'Foreword' of this book expressed his gratefulness to Sant Nidhan Singh Alam for writing a

> life sketch of one of the greatest Indians of modern times. Appreciating biography of Baba Ram Singh, Caveeshar found that it was the first serious attempt to give us a coherent narrative, supported by documentary evidence of the life of a man who had the courage, the imagination, and capacity for organisation with which only rare persons are endowed.[40]

Caveeshar himself perceived 'Baba' Ram Singh that person, who directed his

> efforts at the moral uplift of the masses, the creation of the spirit of self-confidence and self-sacrifice, the setting up of a parallel Government with a view to oust(ing) the foreign dominations, the adoption of the cult of swadeshi to free ourselves from economic serfdom, defiance and disobedience of laws that restricted our liberties, and so many other items of national programme that sound so modern and effective in these days when preaching of revolution has been legalised.[41]

Nidhan Singh Alam projected Satguru Ram Singh as the first freedom fighter and harbinger of Non-Cooperation and Civil Disobedience Movements in Punjab. Alam traced the origin of the Kuka movement to the formation of Sant Khalsa in April 1857. Alam gave details of 'parallel

government' established by Satguru Ram Singh. The structure of the government comprised suba-system, postal service, arrangements for justice and martial training to the 'Kukas' and formation of Kuka regiments etc. Alam narrated the incidents of Tharajwala, Amritsar, Raikot and Malerkotla. He also narrated state-repression perpetrated on the Kukas and deportation of Satguru Ram Singh and his close confidants by the British.

After a decade, Inder Singh Chakarvarti wrote *Malvinder* (1957) which literally mean 'The King of Malwa Region in Punjab'. It was an epic i.e. a long poem on the life of Namdhari Guru Ram Singh. The book reiterated Namdhari Guru's mission in the following verse:[42]

On the bank of Satluj river,
He took water in his palm.
"I take this solemn vow,
Listen O! My brothers!
So long as I don't oust,
The Britishers from the country.
I will not settle down,
At any place whatsoever."

In the last quarter of the 20th century, the Namdhari writers including non-Namdhari writers (but following Namdhari and nationalist perspective), wrote several books on Satguru Ram Singh and Kuka movement: exploring the political overtones in his teachings with reference to the archival material on the Kuka movement in late 19th century. They perceived the Kuka movement as an anti-imperialist movement and Satguru Ram Singh and Kuka Singhs as 'patriots' and 'freedom fighters'. Earliest among the non-Namdhari revolutionaries were Ghadarite revolutionaries. Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna, President of the Ghadar Party, imbibed Namdhari legacy of patriotism from Baba Kesar Singh Mohavewale who synchronised *ishwar-bhagati* with *desh-bhagati*. Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna learnt from Baba

Kesar Singh that religious meditation alone was not enough for a man to survive. He required bread, clothes and shelter. Baba Jawala Singh, another Ghadarite, emulated Namdhari lifestyle. The Ghadarite poets lauded Kuka heroes and their patriotism.[43] In response to revolutionary movements (Ghadar and Babbar Akali) and moderate movement like Non-Cooperation movement, Gaini Kala Singh wrote poem entitled *Kuka Singh Ate Angrej Jaat* in 1922 viewing Kuka struggle as a struggle for country's independence. In 1923, Bishan Singh published a book entitled *Inqlabi Kuka* (A Revolutionary Kuka) and argued that Kuka movement aimed at the liberation of the country. However, it was left to *Shahid-e-Azam* Bhagat Singh to identify the anti-imperialist overtones in the programme of 'Baba' Ram Singh and Kuka movement. Bhagat Singh believed that the Kuka movement was the first rebellion in Punjab against the British. He also believed that Baba Ram Singh was the harbinger of the Non-Cooperation Movement. As early as 1928 Bhagat Singh stated that "In Punjab, first freedom struggle was started with the initiation of the Kuka movement. If we look into the details of the movement it was very important political movement to oust the Britishers from India, also first one and the only movement against the British empire in Punjab during the second half of the nineteenth century."[44] Subsequently, the Congress leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and Babu Rajendra Prasad applied the concepts of non-cooperation and *swadeshi* to the Kuka movement of the 19th century.

It was in 1958 that the first biography of Baba Ram Singh was written by Jaswant Singh Jas under the title *Baba Ram Singh Namdhari* in Punjabi language. He perceived Baba Ram Singh in terms of a spiritual leader of the *Sikh Qaum* who rekindled the spirit of love for country and organised a movement which confronted alien rule. Jas believed that it was Baba Ram Singh who launched Non-Cooperation movement boycotting British Raj and its administrative and cultural institutions. Moreover, Baba Ram Singh was that

social reformer who tried to protect the Indians from the influence of materialism and atheism. He also tried to liberate them from the social evils like female infanticide, child-marriage and a lecherous life. Above all, he exhorted them to earn their livelihood by honest means and to meditate in the name of God.

Jaswant Singh wrote this biography on the basis of literary and journalistic sources (largely Namdhari) and published secondary works. Merit of Jaswant Singh's biography lies in the fact that it narrates origin, course and success of the Kuka Movement under the leadership of Baba Ram Singh in the national perspective.[45]

In 1965, Fauja Singh and M.M. Ahluwalia published their respective works. The former wrote *Kuka Movement: An important phase in Punjab's Role in India's Struggle for Freedom* and the latter entitled his work *Kukas-The Freedom Fighters of Punjab.* They argued that programme of socio-religious reforms undertaken by Baba Ram Singh was essentially a spade work for political ends. In Fauja Singh's words

> the principal aim with which the Kuka Movement was initiated was political, though great weight was attached to religious and social regeneration, which was thought most necessary for the attainment of the chosen political goal. However, the political commitments of the movement were not very clear for some time after its commencement. This has misled some people into believing that it was not a political movement, at least in the beginning. This view is believed by the facts of the situation.[46]

Subscribing to the assessment of the British officials, Fauja Singh quotes the observation of Lieutenant Governor of Punjab who found that

> whatever the original tendency of Kuka doctrine may have been, they have now become a political character, the

> designs of the leaders, more or less understood by their followers, being an attempt at restoration of the Sikh power in Punjab.[47]

It was on this assumption that Fauja Singh perceived the teachings of Baba Ram Singh and substantiated his argument with comprehensive archival sources. Similarly, M. M. Ahluwalia argued that Kuka Sikhs were pioneers in the Indian struggle for freedom. Paying tribute to Namdhari Guru Ram Singh, he says that

> Guru Ram Singh occupies a place among those great men of the world who suffered for their convictions and whose sacrifice at the altar of their faith was not merely an isolated event. Like seasoned patriots and sincere leaders, Guru Ram Singh rose to a position of eminence 'deed by deed and tear by tear.' He possessed a noble disposition and undaunted character. His was the remarkably unique personality whose manliness burnt with the brightest flame in the hour of darkness.[48]

W.H. McLeod perceived "The Kukas: A Millenarian Sect of Punjab" and added an aura to the charismatic personality of Namdhari Guru Ram Singh. The term millenarian is applied to characterise religious movements that expect imminent, total, and ultimate, the worldly collective salvation.[49] McLeod applies this paradigm to the contemporary socio-economic conditions of 19th century Punjab. He finds that there was a general social discontent prevalent among the agriculturist and artisan classes. The Jat Sikh agriculturists and artisans were victim of agrarian crisis which reflected in the universal phenomena of indebtedness and alienation of the cultivated land. It is in this context that Baba Ram Singh came to the scene and delivered messianic message to the Sikhs. Thousands of Jat Sikh peasantry and artisan classes responded to his message. Namdhari Guru Ram Singh could mobilise the

discontentment of his followers against the privileged landed and priestly classes.

Briefly speaking we observe a transformation in the personality of Namdhari Guru Ram Singh portrayed in the writings of Namdhari as well as non-Namdhari writers, scholars and historians. In the wake of marginalisation of the Kuka Sikhs by the state-apparatus, the Namdhari writers of *Bara-mahas* and *Gurbilas* literature felt a social and political urgency and 'showed a creative imagination in struggle' and rose to the political occasion excellently. In the initial stage, the Namdhari writers perceived their guru in terms of holyman, a messenger of *Akal Purakh* who launched a divine mission; performed miracles; dispelled darkness and ignorance; eliminated tyrants and their exploitation and restored *dharma*. Articulating autonomous collective consciousness of the Namdhari community, these writers stated that Satguru Ram Singh founded *teesra panth* amidst irreligiousness. They also perceived spiritual and temporal hegemony of their Satguru by alleviating over his rivals. Some of these writers tried to appropriate Sikh history in terms of declaring their spiritual masters to the Status of Guru. Similarly, in the writings of Namdhari and non-Namdhari scholars and political activists, the Namdhari Guru began to emerge as a harbinger of Swadeshi and Non-Cooperation Movements in early 20th century. It was the Ghadarite and socialist revolutionaries who discovered anti-imperialist overtones in his programme. They began to remember him as a great patriot and his followers the freedom fighters. It was a major leap forward in comprehending the personality of Namdhari Guru Ram Singh from being a protagonist of the Khalsa Raj to a national hero.

Notes and References

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3. Tara Singh Anjan, p 39.
4. Rattan Singh Jaggi, *Dasam Granth da Kartritav*, Punjabi Sahit Sabha. New Delhi 1966; also see, Robin Rinehart "Strategies for Interpreting the Dasam Granth", *Sikhism and History*, (Pashaura Singh and N. Gerald Barrier), Oxford University Press, 2004, pp 135-150.
5. Tara Singh Anjan, pp 30-31, 46-47.
6. Op.Cit., pp 23-24, 52-53:
7. Ibid.
8. Op. Cit, pp 49-50: (Sant Nihal Singh)
9. Hew McLeod, *Sikhism*, Penguin Books, 1997, p 181.
10. Nidhan Singh Alam made an attempt in this regard and wrote *Jug Paltao Satguru* before partition of Punjab in 1947. It was the antithesis of Dr Ganda Singh's *Kukian Di Vithia* (1944).
11. Op. Cit., pp 33-34, 37, 40-41; for comparison see, W.H. McLeod, Sikhs of the Khalsa, *A History of Khalsa Rahit*, Oxford 2005 (paper back).
12. *Sri Satguru Bilas Patshahi Barvin*, pp 71-77.
13. Op. Cit., pp 124-132.
14. According to Hinduism, status of each avtar is determined by the number of these attributes possessed by him: Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha, *Mahan Kosh*, Bhasha Vibhag Punjab Patiala, 1988 (reprint), p 234.
15. *Sri Satguru Bilas Patshahi Barvin*, pp 133-136.
16. Jaswinder Singh is of the opinion that village Bahowal is in Hoshiarpur not in Gurdaspur as claimed by another Namdhari writer: Jaswinder Singh (Ed.), *Satguru Bilas*. Pt I. Bhaini Sahib. Ludhiana 2002, p 8.
17. The Kalal were both Muslim Jats and Hindu Rajputs. They also styled themselves Ahluwalia, from Ahlu, a village in Lahore. They frequently embraced Sikhism. By occupation they were minor agriculturists and distillers in 19th century: *A Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of Punjab and North West Frontier* (E.O. MacLagan and H.A. Rose), Languages Department, 1970 (Reprint), p 488.
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30. For detail, see Sant Nidhan Singh Alam, *Guru Pad Parkash*, Pt.III, Sri Bhaini Sahib, Ludhiana, pp 1-2 (including foreword); Sewa Singh, *Guru Pad Nirne*, Amritsar, 1934, pp 133-38.
31. Ganda Singh, *Guru Gobind Singh's Death at Nanded and Examination of the Succession Theories*, Sikh Cultural Centre, Calcutta, p 9.
32. For detail, see, Gurmit Singh, *Sant Khalsa*, Usha Institute of Religious Studies, Sirsa, 1978, pp 71-74, Mehar Singh wrote a book *Koorh Na Puje Sach Nun Sau Gharhai Gharhiey* reiterated Namdhari view point. Tarn Singh Vehmi published *Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji Da Nandedon Bad Da Jiwan* in 1962. In 1967, Amar Bharati wrote *Sri Dasmesh Nandedon Pichhon* reproduced Vehmi's source-material and his view-point Namdhari writers continue to reiterate their view-point.
33. W.H. McLeod, pp 52-58; Rattan Singh Jaggi, *Guru Granth Vishavkosh*, Pt. I. Punjabi University, Patiala, 2002, pp 79-81.
34. Inder Singh Chakarvarti, *Namdhari Nitnem*, Jiwan Nagar, Hissar, 1957, pp 1-2.
35. Chakarvarti, pp 2, 7.
36. Ibid, pp 3-7.
37. Kuldip Singh, *The Namdhari Movement: Continuity and Change*, Ph.D. Thesis. Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 2000, pp 135-36.
38. Inder Singh Chakarvarti, pp 13-14.
39. Ibid, pp 18-20.
40. "Foreword", *Jug Paltaoo Satguru* , (Nidhan Singh Alam), Namdhari Darbar, Sri Bhaini Sahib, 2006 (reprint).
41. Ibid.
42. Cited Gurmit Singh, pp 72-73.
43. Bhagat Singh Bilga. "Gadar Party Te Kuka Lehar" in his book *Mem Vatan*, see *Satjug* March-April 2002, p 38.
44. Cited in *Namdhari Sikhs: The Pioneer Freedom Fighters*, (Ed. H.S. Hanspal), Namdhari Darbar Sri Bhaini Sahib, Punjab, 2006, pp 10, 21.
45. See, "Foreword", *Baba Ram Singh Namdhari* (Jaswant Singh), Jalandhar, 1958.
46. Fauja Singh, *Kuka Movement*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1965, p 190.
47. Ibid.
48. M.M. Ahluwalia, *Kukas : The Freedom Fighters of Punjab*, Allied Publishers, New Delhi, 1965, p 174.
49. Kuldip Singh, p 81.

APPENDIX

Namdhari Rahit-nama and Namdhari Ardas

The Rahit-nama [issued by] the Twelfth Master
By the grace of the Eternal One, the True Guru.

From Ram Singh and the Khalsa of Bhaini to all members of the Khalsa. Accept our greeting: *Vahiguru ji ka Khalsa, Sri Vahiguruji ki fateh.* This *rahit-nama* has been written for the benefit of all sangats and has been issued from Bhaini. [1]

Rise during the last watch of the night and taking a pot of water [for cleansing] go into the fields to relieve yourself. When you return scour the pot twice, remove the clothes that you were wearing while in the fields; clean your teeth, bathe, and recite [the prescribed portions of] sacred scripture. If you do not already know these by heart you should learn them. Everyone should do this, including women both old and young. Commit both *Japuji* and *Jap* to memory, and also *Shabad Hazare.* [2]

You must also learn *Rahiras* and *Arati Sohila* by heart. All should lead a life of restraint and contentment. Offer praise to the Guru, [the Lord] of Truth throughout the day and night. [3]

Respect the daughter or the sister of another man as you would your own. The Guru has told us how we should regard the rights of others. [4]

Violating another's rights, Nanak, should be treated with the same abhorrence as a Muslim would feel for eating a pig or a Hindu would feel for killing a cow. [5]

He who fails to take initiation from the Guru and utters the Guru's mantra without first receiving it from him shall have his face blackened in this world and the next. [6]

Let no one speak maliciously of another. Be forgiving towards others, taking no account of what they may say about you. Even the person who strikes you must be forgiven. The Guru is your Protector. [7]

Always conceal your own good deeds from others. Gather to sing the sacred hymns regularly. Sing passages from the scripture daily. [8]

When *yag (yajna)* is to be performed purify the place where it is to be held by plastering it. Bring earthen vessels that have not previously been used and wash your feet before entering *the jag* square. There perform the *havan,* or *hom.* Use wood from either the *palah* or the *ber* tree. Do not [fan the fire by] blowing it with human breath. During the course of the ritual fire service, [five officiants] should read the following from copies of the scripture: *Chaupai, Japuji, Jap, Chandi Charitr,* and *Akal Ustat. A* sixth officiant should meanwhile pour incense [on the fire] and a seventh should [intermittently] sprinkle a few drops of water on it. [9]

Do not admit to religious assemblies anyone who commits an evil deed such as adultery or theft. If the culprit happens to be a powerful person all should pray that he will be rendered unable to enter the congregation. [10]

But my understanding is limited. You yourself know all that one needs to know. Let all stand reverently before the Almighty One *(paramesar)* with palms joined and pray: 'Sustain our faith, O Lord.' [11]

Always wear the approved kachh. When taking off a kachh withdraw one leg and put it in the leg-hole of another pair before withdrawing the second leg. Never conceal an evil deed committed by another person. Do not sell or barter a daughter or a sister. Constantly repeat the Guru's name. Never eat meat nor drink liquor. Continue always in the fear of the Almighty One. [12]

The Namdhari Ardas

Victory to Vahiguru the Eternal One
May Sri Bhagauti grant assistance
[In the name of] the Twelfth Master

First remembering Sri Bhagauti turns your thoughts to Guru Nanak; Angad Guru, Amar Das, each with Ram Das, grants us aid. Arjan and Hargobind, think of them and Hari Rai. Dwell on Siri Hari Krishan, he whose sight dispels all pain. Think of Guru Tegh Bahadur; thus shall every treasure come. Grant us, Guru Gobind Singh, help and strength in every place. Remember Guru Balak Singh, he who has shown us the way to truth. Remember Satguru Ram Singh, Master of our faith, and he who directs our worldly actions, he who knows our inmost thoughts, Sri Akal Purakh who sets us free from the grip of death. Remember Guru Hari Singh, light incarnate, he who heals and restores: and Satguru Partap Singh who in this present Age of Darkness has preached perfect piety, purity, the practice of repeating the divine Name and recitation of the scriptures. May they grant us help and strength in every place.

Remember the Master's four sons, the Cherished Five, and the Forty Liberated. Remember all martyrs to the faith; they who were faithful in their remembrance of the divine Name and generous to others; they who gave their heads for their faith, steadfast in their loyalty to the true teachings of Sikhism and defending their uncut hair to their last, breath; they who fearlessly spoke the truth; they who for their faith wielded the sword and shared their sustenance with others; they who were blown away from guns, condemned to the horrors of transportation or to hanging, and who yet clung to their faith in the Satgurus. Meditate on the greatness of these stalwart disciples and call to mind the divine Name.

Guru and Master, we who are miserable sinners, having heard how you wondrously raise the fallen, cast us at your

door. Bestow on us, by your grace, the blessing of the Guru's teachings. Grant that we may be found only in the company of your faithful servants, never with the proud and worldly. May the commandments which you give as Guru in the Granth Sahib always be obeyed. Grant me the gift of faith in your commandments wherever I may be. Save me, Lord, from wavering in my faith. Grant that my love may be bestowed on none save only you. Preserve me ever. O Lord, from loss of faith in you.

All in this assembly pray that you will mercifully reveal yourself in all your glory. Bring to an end the killing of the poor and the cow, extend the true faith over the earth, free all who are imprisoned, destroy those who are evil, and exalt your true Khalsa (Sant Khalsa).

Our sins, O Lord, are many. Regard not our sins but mercifully bring us into your care and protection.

In your name we pray, and in the trust that we may behold your presence. Forgive the shortcomings of our prayer. Dwell within all our hearts that we may continue to sing your praises to eternity. May your Sikhs be victorious in all places and may they who have heard and sung your praises be sustained in all their deeds. Grant that we may behold your most sacred presence. May then name of Satguru Ram Singh be magnified and by your grace may all be blessed.

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Namdhari Guru Ram Singh (1816-85), founder of Kuka movement, played a prominent role in the struggle of India at the time when the British had taken over the entire country. Namdhari Guru Ram Singh was the first charismatic leader who launched anti-colonial movement in Punjab, known as the Kuka movement on 12 April 1857 which synchronised with the uprising of 1857, the first war of Independence. Through this movement, he also introduced to the world the notion of Non-Cooperation and Swadeshi as non-violent tools to free India from the yoke of foreign rulers. Mahatma Gandhi later used the concept of Non-Cooperation and Civil Disobedience Movement propounded by him as political weapons against the British rule.

Namdhari Guru Ram Singh was also a social reformer. He abolished slaughtering of cows in holy cities. He advocated marriages of all classes and castes without any discrimination, exhorted his followers to stop committing infanticide, selling daughters in marriage and also to rise about caste distinctions. He was equally worried about the menace of prostitution.

The author, Joginder Singh is a Professor and Head of Namdhari Guru Ram Singh Chair, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar. He has to his credit several books and various articles on socio-religious and political articulation of the Sikhs during the 20th century. With more than twenty years teaching experience he has also contributed in many research projects.

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